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Dissent in South Asian literary cultures

Eds. Heinz Werner Wessler, Uppsala University
Alessandra Consolaro, University of Turin

Orientalia Suecana LX (2011)

Dissent in South Asian literary cultures

Heinz Werner Wessler, Uppsala University
Alessandra Consolaro, University of Turin

Ever since the development of modern literature in South Asia, there has been a tension between the combined, all-encompassing, national, progressivist narrative and various forms of the subaltern, which often subverts the universal claim of culturally and politically nationalist writing. The dominant nationalist discourse is meant to be all-inclusive, but it inherently produces its own forms of exclusion, cultural and social marginalization, which again encourages resistance, and sometimes rebellion.

The experience of exclusion and marginalization is an important element of the social and cultural fabric all over South Asia. This volume presents a selection of articles that focus on aspects of dissent in modern and pre-modern literature. The articles refer to parallel cultures in general and to subcultures in particular, but also to alternative models of cultural expressivity that tend to subvert established patterns and conventions, like parody or satire. They also highlight texts that focus on the interplay between ideology and cultural aesthetics.

Consolaro's contribution presents the novel *Mohan Dās* (Mohan Das) by the contemporary Hindi writer Uday Prakāś as a multi-layered story of resistance, both from the point of view of content – the struggle of a young Dalit resisting the oppression of the hegemonic caste society – and of style, the text being a call for an alternative canon in Hindi literature, resisting the middle-class mainstream.

Montaut and Oesterheld focus on parody and satire in Hindi theatre and Pakistani Urdu literature respectively. Montaut analyses Habīb Tanvīr's play *Āgrā Bāzār* (Agra Market) emphasizing how, through the use of parody, the text denounces the failure of the dominant political and cultural norms to build a fair society, and suggests that the rich potential of folk culture can help in countering this failure. While parody has never played a prominent role in mainstream Hindi literature and literary criticism, Urdu literature has an old and very profound tradition of literary production in the comic mode. Oesterheld focuses on some twentieth-century writers to show how the creation of Pakistan and the postcolonial geopolitical situation led to an unprecedented emphasis on the Islamic overtones even in literary productions by radical secularist authors. The necessity to defend and justify one's Muslim identity appears to supersede the earlier more relaxed position on religion, so that bitterness prevails over humour and levity.

Wessler's analysis of the novel *Tāvīz* (The Amulet) by the contemporary Hindi writer Sheila Rohekar emphasizes the difficulty of asserting individual identity beyond superimposed mainstream identity markers. The novel is a rare example of Jewish writing in Hindi. The stereotypical discourse on secularism and communalism is treated with a certain sensitivity that is validated by the identity of the author as a representative of a small community.

Zecchini's contribution on Arun Kolatkar's poetry highlights the research into alternative ways of belonging, refusing the majoritarian and exclusive perceptions of identity and "rootedness". Kolatkar, a bilingual poet writing in Marathi and English, rejects the binary opposition between minority and majority, hovers over boundaries, and asserts the existence of an inexhaustibly plural reality and identity.

Strelkova's article compares two great classics of twentieth-century Hindi prose: Ajneya's novel *Apne apne ajnabī* (To Each his Stranger) and Kṛṣṇā Sobti's *Ai Laṛkī* (Hey, Girl!). In her reading, this latter work, written about thirty years later than Ajneya's, can be analysed as a "stylistically alternative model" that tends to subvert the one offered by Ajneya. Ajneya is mainly interested in the relations between an individual hero and society as a whole, while in most of Kṛṣṇā Sobti's novels a heroine is contra-posed to family as part of the community/society. In both cases, only marginal situations can create the conditions for understanding the existential dimensions of life. The deeper layer focuses on the question of whether or not Life and Death are comprehensible and of whether or not God can be reached by human beings.

The selection proceeds with two contributions shifting the focus to two other important aspects of the thematic focus on "Dissent and South Asian Literary Cultures". The first of these is addressed in Singh and DeBruijn's contribution, focussing on Sunny Singh's story *A Cup Full of Jasmine Oil* (reprinted after the article), and emphasizes the functionality of the aesthetic concept of this literary work in relation to the representation of rebellion. The theme running through the analysis hinted at by the author herself in the interview, is the need to refer to both Western and Indian aesthetics when analysing creative writing from contemporary South Asia, and not to give precedence to any specific hermeneutic strategy.

Squarcini's article, which concludes our selection, takes us back in time, but is also a further step in the discussion of the epistemological importance of voices of dissent. Their function as essential elements in understanding the textual production of "orthodox" traditions is emphasized. Dissident traditions have often been consigned to oblivion, even though a mainstream tradition can achieve its privileged status only "after passing over, assimilating, defeating, or even concealing the logical and historical legitimacy of its opponents and competitors". In the process of intellectual production and transmission, dissenting voices therefore represent "an agonistic aspect of cultural production which is intrinsically in no way marginal at all".

Most of the articles highlighted in this volume have their origin in a panel convened by Thomas de Bruijn and Alessandra Consolaro at the 21st European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies held in Bonn (Germany) in July 2010.

May 2012

Resistance in the postcolonial Hindi literary field: *Mohan Dās* by Uday Prakāś

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Abstract

This paper reads Uday Prakāś's *Mohan Dās* as a multi-layered story of resistance. From the thematic point of view, it is a story of marginality, featuring a young Dalit resisting the oppression of the hegemonic society. It is also a story of multiple identities – or of a total loss of identity. The text resists gender categorisation. There is continuous meta-textual play: Mohan Dās reminds us of the historical Mahatma Gandhi not only through his name (the Mahatma's given name is 'Mohandas Karamchand'), but also concerning his ideas and actions (persisting in his search for truth, never resorting to violence). Other fictional characters in *Mohan Dās* obviously refer to the Hindi literary field, like Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh and Śamśer Bahādur Siṃh. As *Mohan Dās* was first published in the literary magazine *Haṃs* in the Premcand anniversary issue (August 2005), and Uday Prakāś often refers to Hindi authors of the past in his works, it is possible to analyse the text as calling for an alternative canon in Hindi literature, one that resists the mainstream. *Mohan Dās* can be seen as an example of postmodern Hindi literature in which the focus is not on the urban middle class, but on the rural and subaltern India.

Keywords: Hindi literature, postmodern, postcolonial, Dalit identity, globalization, Uday Prakash

In this article I focus on a story by Uday Prakāś, *Mohan Dās*, to analyse some aspects that show resistance to the mainstream, both from the formal point of view and in terms of the content. I argue that Uday Prakāś's literary resistance is meant as taking a political stand: the committed intellectual is ascribed the role of speaking truth in a world oriented around the triumph of untruthfulness.

A counter-narrative on dalitism: *Mohan Dās*, Gandhi, and (missing) Ambedkar

Uday Prakāś's *Mohan Dās* can be read as a multi-layered story of resistance, focussing on two aspects: from the thematic point of view, it is a story of marginality, featuring a young *dalit* resisting the oppression of the hegemonic society. The protagonist's identity is stolen by an unscrupulous Brahmin character as part of a deep-rooted conspiracy involving the whole community, and this launches his heroic struggle. The second aspect is formal. *Mohan Dās* resists gender categorization – it is a long short story (82 pages with 12 drawings), or a very short novel, exhibits continuous meta-textual play, and can be read as a critique of the Hindi literary canon.

Uday Prakāś creates the story of a *dalit* hero who shows a clear resemblance with Gandhi, thus constructing a literary character that is a sort of postcolonial version of Gandhi. This is a daring act, considering the famous contraposition between Gandhi and Ambedkar. But it also goes against the current because it is a choice that opposes the prevalent discourse in *dalit* policy, based on Ambedkar and his iconography of *dalit* emancipation. In such a counter-narrative, the meta-discourse of *dalit* unity is challenged by the insurrection of little selves. This *dalit avatār* of Gandhi finds himself again and again in a helpless situation, yet not even a single Gandhian activist or organization is made available in the story to help him. Even while expressing a deep sympathy for Gandhian thought, the text makes no allowance for any sympathetic argument about whatever is left of the Gandhian project in the contemporary world.

The text resists the mainstream *dalit* discourse. In the prevalent overwhelming presence of the national memory of Ambedkar, Uday Prakāś chooses not to introduce him as Mohan Dās's co-fighter and/or helper, thus refusing to adhere to the discourse of the politicized *dalit* masses. Yet, the reader is immediately reminded of Ambedkar by the very presence of a protagonist who is an educated *dalit* fighting for his 'reserved seat' in government jobs while at the same time belonging to a little community of untouchables and professing a *kabīrpanthī* existence. Thus, Ambedkar's invisibility must be investigated in order to understand the text. Mohan Dās's story does not limit itself to confronting the reader with the devastating existence of a *dalit*, but is also set against an extremely gloomy scenario, representing the collapse of institutional egalitarianism and the resultant failure of the entire civilization. More concretely, it offers a general critique of representational democracy, exposing the limits of Ambedkar's modernization project.

The oppression of *dalits* has been going on for ages, but Mohan Dās's story is the product of a distinct modernity (or postmodernity?). In fact, the story also portrays a political and social change affecting contemporary Hindu society. In a rural and semi-urban setting, a young Brahmin usurps a constitutionally mediated scheduled caste identity, reserved for ex-untouchables, and while doing so neither he nor his family show any hesitation out of fear of ritualistic pollution. How can such a change take place in the midst of the *hindutva* discourse? One possible answer is that the secular-bureaucratic structure of this constitutional identity is sufficient to guarantee them safety. The relation between this character and other upper-caste characters is founded on a shared middle-class identity, giving the fake Mohan Dās, who in any case is not made outcaste and maintains his *birādarī* links, a sort of "neo-Brahmin" status. Significantly, this is not perceived as a threat by the upper-caste characters.

Mohan Dās is denied justice and he complains about that. But his lament stresses the fact that his constitutional identity has been stolen only because his *birādarī* is not represented in key positions of power: no one from his community has yet obtained any high governmental or political position. This literary representation of Ambedkar therefore represents the tragic story of a small community excluded from its rightful place in the ranks of the emerging *dalit* political community because it is too weak in the numbers game of politics. This is not a disadvantage inflicted upon *dalit*s by tradition: it is the result of the violence of a hierarchical modernity. It represents a larger problem of modernity (or postmodernity?) and it poses the problem of a post-Ambedkar rethinking of the *dalit* issue, launching an incisive critique of the variants of new and old Indian modernities, distrusting them, and opening new ground for exploration. Mohan Dās is totally ignored by the political community, and his experiences are so confusing and disabling that the iconography of *dalit* emancipation does not work any longer. The political rise of the *dalits* in North India has, in fact, coincided with the strengthening of caste and identity politics. The formation of *dalit* political communities with their own power structures is a major contribution of Ambedkar's discourse, and has had a radical effect on the process of social development and on liberal democratic values. The literary representation of this process raises some basic questions that await further investigation. They regard, for example, the principle of equality (What happens to it in the working out of this political community?), the future of this new community identity (Will this political community give rise to a social community as well, according to the theories of liberal democracy, or is it bound to remain an exclusively political community?), and the necessity to re-evaluate the results of Ambedkar's emancipation discourse (How would Ambedkar react if he were present today to witness the results of his project of social revolution in Northern India?).

Postcolonialism? Postmodernism ?

I will try to analyse *Mohan Dās*, a brilliant piece of the literary imagination written in an experimental style with a deceptively simple narrative, as an example of postcolonial and/or postmodern Hindi literature, while problematizing the use of these labels. The text focuses not on the urban middle class, but on the rural and subaltern India. This is part of the globalised world, even if it seems to be totally aloof: the narrator's interventions emphasise the contemporaneity of events that seem to happen in a parallel world, creating a stylistic rupture. It is also a story of multiple identities — or of a total loss of identity — that has already had multiple *avatār*s, with an inter-media translation in the form a cinematic version.[1]

The label "postmodern" poses the issue of the pertinence of using a Western epistemological tool in order to analyse a text like *Mohan Dās*. Very often the terms postmodern and postcolonial have been used as synonyms; therefore it is necessary to briefly discuss the validity of this equivalence. Western critics often use this equivalence in order to include in the category of "postmodern" writers originally from former colonies, so that the field of postmodern critique gains prestige. On the contrary, critics from former colonies prefer to distinguish between these categories: they emphasise that the "post" in postcolonial is not to be meant in a temporal sense, but rather denotes a reaction to "colonial" (in this sense, "post-colonial" could be meant as "anti-colonial"). Some western critics claim that society after the collapse of empires is both postmodern and postcolonial. Yet, the end of empires did not mark the end of colonialism; on the contrary, we can see that today a form of neo-colonialism is alive and kicking, with its own forms of economic and cultural exploitation.

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[1] Mohandas. A man lost in his own nation (2009) 112 min. Director: Mazhar Kamran; Producer: Abha Sonakia. Starring: Sonali Kulkarni, Nakul Vaid, Sushant Singh, Sharbani Mukherjee, Sameer Dharmadhikari, Aditya Srivastav, Akhilendra Mishra, Govind Namdeo, Uttam Haldar. Music Director: Vivek Priyadarshan.

At least three characteristics that can be traced in Mohan Dās are shared by both postmodern and postcolonial novels, and serve as the grounds for the claim that the postcolonial can be considered in some way a branch of the postmodern:

- the interest in meta-narration, the narration of stories about writers, musing on the act of writing
- the rethinking of history, with the production of an alternative history, written from the point of view of those who are generally excluded from historiographic texts: marginal people, the defeated, the formerly colonised, proletarians, women, the "others"
- re-writing famous works of the literary canons.

But there is a major difference. In the Western postmodern production there is a triumph of chaos, randomness, and nothing follows logical links; nevertheless, the story is narrated in a strongly mimetic way, so that its results are credible to the audience. Writers from the former colonies also focus on writing and the writing (or telling) character, with an urgency typical of the theme of the struggle with time. But in the characters/writers of Anglo-Saxon postmodern novels (for example, Paul Auster) writing is an individual act: it is an action necessary for the individual in order to survive the metropolis. On the contrary, in postcolonial texts, narration generally has a collective dimension; even when the narrator is an individual, his or her stories are at the same time both an individual's autobiography and the lives of hundreds of people at the same level as the individual narration. This is a difference between the concepts postcolonial and postmodern that makes it impossible to equate them. The postmodern Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere imagines a totally disembodied world, but the "indigenous" imagination is physical, fleshy, and embodied. The literature of colonised/ex-colonised is born of an act of cannibalism:[2] reality is expressed after having been interiorised and digested,[3] and the writer is not a ghost, but rather his/her narrative urgency stems from his/her having swallowed everything.[4] Nothing happens by chance and reality does not exclude imagination, fantasy, and magic, and there is a total refusal of the mimetic mode. In this literary production there is an abundance of unreliable narrators who blatantly omit, forget, or give wrong information about time and space, modify events, and yet still want to be trusted, even when it is possible to prove rationally and objectively that they are wrong. This process excludes the possibility of the final catharsis. The reader, in a position of estrangement like that in Brecht's theatre, is invited to take an ideological position. It is a narrative with a strong choral and dialectic connotation. These narrators do not write in order to save themselves, but rather in order to save India or a collective identity connected to the idea of India.

According to some critics, the postmodern and postcolonial re-writing of history can be labelled with the common definition of "historiographic metafiction".[5] But many Western postmodern novels are characterised by an investigation of the crisis of historicity that results in the impossibility to know, interpret, re-conquer history. At most there is personal history, random and fragmentary reality irrupting into an individual's life, that is always and only *hic et nunc*, a present devoid of a temporal dimension. The discourse focuses on the end of the ability to knowing, on 'terminality', on the end of history, on amnesia; the collective and social dimension is absent, there is no memory, and everything focuses on the relations between subjectivity, history, and personal history.

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[2] Bassnett and Trivedi 1999: 1–17.

[3] In India this can also be seen as a reflection of a very ancient notion of cosmic order, according to which the world is constructed and organized by "cooking" the world itself, as in the ritual sacrifice, which in the microcosm corresponds to digestion: Malamoud 1994.

[4] Rushdie 1984: 11.

On the contrary, much postcolonial fiction shows that getting back one's own history does not lead to the recreation of a past that cannot be taken back, but rather is the search for a sense of belonging, the possibility to be part of a community or a group, of being there. History becomes a collective dynamic, and this is well shown by diaspora writers. The idea of re-appropriating one's own past through a normative use of imagination and fantasy is shown to be naive. Notwithstanding the difficulty of maintaining faith in historicity and the sense of deep crisis, many postcolonial writers have confidence in the idea that the crisis can be overcome, thanks to an inner imaginative power, the capacity to keep on nurturing dreams: dreams of revolution or rebirth, that in any case are opposed to the notion of the end of history. A clear example of this attitude in Uday Prakāś's writing can be found in short stories like *Pāl Gomrā kā skūṭar* (Prakāś 2004: 34–76, see in particular 63–64) or *Vāren Hesṭings kā sāṁṛ* (Prakāś 2004: 103–160).

Let me briefly reflect on this issue with regard to *Mohan Dās*. In the text there is a complex articulation of past, present, and future, and of the sense of history. First of all there is continuous reference to the present world, which is emphasised by the writer/narrator's parenthetical interventions; these inserts remind the reader that the story being narrated does not belong to the past, is not referred to "once upon a time", but rather to this present world. Even if the characters have lifestyles and life standards that date back at least 150 years, and even if the hierarchical relations have not changed in a century and a half, these human beings are acting in the contemporary world. This is indicated through constant reference to current events and news.

The emphasis on the sense of belonging is achieved in a negative way: the narration stresses the exclusion of *dalit*s from the national project. The characters belong to non-scheduled castes and tribes (the *baṃshar* and *palihā* communities), to minority religious groups (*kabīrpanthī*); they are listed as *ādivāsī*, and have no political or economic power. There is a sense of community belonging, but it does not act as a strong identification marker. Individuals belonging to these groups do feel empathy towards each other and share a community life, but their living conditions are so dire and troubled that there is no time for unselfishness and altruism: "Nobody had been able to get beyond their own troubles and sufferings. They were all people living this time silently, in sweat and tears" (Prakāś 2009: 45, my translation). The focus is on the extreme suffering that these individuals have to bear and on the de-humanizing effect of it, which is instrumental for the upper castes' and politically organised groups' maintenance of their privilege and power.

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[5] Hutcheon 1988.

The link to a collective history is nevertheless very relevant, as each individual's personal suffering reflects collective decisions on policy that remain out of his/her reach. Mohan Dās loses the fertile public soil that allowed him to get an extra income because of energy planning projects based on dam construction, land alienation, and permanent alteration of the ecosystem: land is flooded with water, flowing water becomes stagnant, and flora and fauna are destroyed.

From what is said above it is possible to claim that *Mohan Dās* does possess some characteristics of a postmodern story, but also other interesting traits that make the picture more complex. The notion of time in *Mohan Dās* is evidence of a South Asian modality of thinking about time as a spiral-like process. The conclusion, in fact, confers a mythical dimension to the story of Mohan Dās, who appears to be the contemporary manifestation of Eklavya, evoking the myth of the deluge as well (Prakāś 2009: 86–87). This is shown by the final reference to an archer who keeps on firing his arrows until he drowns, even when he knows there is no way out, even when no hope is left. This actor is named Rāghav, as if signalling a new *dalit/ ādivāsī* re-enactment of Rām's epic. These characters are committed to truth, as Gandhi was. Thus the story is projected into a cosmic dimension much wider than history. *Satyagraha* may be defeated on an empirical level, but it maintains its strength on a cosmic one. The same narrative strategy is used in the above-mentioned short stories *Pāl Gomrā kā skūṭar* and *Vāren Hesṭings kā sāṁṛ*, where events happened in the past are brought up to date, thus showing their universal dimension: individual characters may disappear, die, or be defeated, but the meaning of their struggle, as well as the collective or cosmic value of acts of rebellion inspired by a sense of justice and truth, remain and reappear from age to age.

Meta-textual play

In *Mohan Dās* there is continuous meta-textual play, which is explicitly stated by the narrator/writer himself. The character of Mohan Dās carries markers of personal identity that exhibit a clear resemblance with Gandhi. He lives in Purabnarā, a name reminding us of Porbandar (Prakāś 2009: 87). His father, Kābā Dās, echoes Karamcand Gāṃdhī, the Mahatma's father, whose second name was Kābā; also Mohan Dās's mother's name, Putlī Bāī, is the same as Gandhi's mother's; Kastūrī Bāī is, of course, a reminder of Kastūrbā, the Mahatma's wife (Prakāś 2009: 11–12). Also, his ideas and actions mirror the story of the Mahatma, with him persisting in his search for truth and never resorting to violence. Gandhi fought injustice in Porbandar, Kāṭhiyāvāṛ, Rājkoṭ and abroad, in South Africa, or else at Bajāj-Bīṛlā Bhavan; now it seems he was born in Chattīsgaṛh and into the distress of heat and hunger, illness and sweat, insult and injustice – in the fields and the wastelands, the ditches and the caves, and the forests of the Vindhya region. The narrator is a male "I" who intervenes, creating a stylistic rupture as he writes in parentheses and italics, thus also marking his interludes typographically. In his first intervention he directly addresses the audience, requesting to be trusted, while emphasizing that this is not a symbolic narration (*pratīk kathā*), nor an allegory (*rūpak*), or a fictional narration (*kūṭākhyān*); he defines it as a plain story (*bilkul sapāṭ sā kissā*). But, he adds, to tell the truth it is not even a story (*kissā*), because it is a picture of the real world behind the veil of fiction (*kahāni*). The characters are real individuals. Mohan Dās is defined as *asliyat* (genuine, real); one can find him in any Indian village. The *exergo* ("To the comrade Vijendra Sonī, in the hope that he'll stand to the end together with Mohan Dās") assures the readers that this is a true story, as Vijendra Sonī is the name of the lawyer who in 1996 brought the curious case of "Shobhalal versus Shobhalal" before the Anuppur court.

Another meta-textual level is the reference to Premcand. *Mohan Dās* was first published in *Haṃs* in the Premcand anniversary issue (August 2005) and there is an explicit reference to this event (Prakāś 2009: 29) as well as to the fact that the lifestyle of the main characters clearly resembles that of Premcand's *kisāns*, characters in stories of the past. But the narrator emphasizes that the story's *śailī* (genre), *śilp* (technique), and *bhāṣā* (language) are typical of the post 9/11 globalised world. Therefore there is continuous play with the notion of a layered 'real'.

I think it is possible to call all this postmodern, without excluding the possibility of interpreting Uday Prakāś using a more grounded South Asian vocabulary. On the other hand, if we assume the point of view that Uday Prakāś himself proposes and consider the world we live in as highly networked, branding things Western and Eastern does not seem to be very useful or wise.

An alternative canon

The final point I would like to make concerns the issue of Hindi and the Hindi canon. The hero's helpers in *Mohan Dās* are three great figures of Hindi literature from the recent past that Uday Prakāś imaginatively recalls. Uday Prakāś has very harsh words for the official Hindi language and for mainstream Hindi literature, not only in this long short story, but also in other works. It is a feature of his writing to make frequent reference to Hindi authors of the past; therefore it is possible to analyse the text (and his whole production) as calling for an alternative canon in Hindi literature, resisting the mainstream.

I have chosen to explore this issue by focussing on two texts, *Mohan Dās* and the novel *Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī*, which exhibit frequent references to Hindi literature. *Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī* is more directly connected to the discussion of Hindi language and literature, as the setting of the story is a Hindi university department. The protagonist, an educated *dalit* boy decides to study Hindi literature in order to follow his heart, and finds himself in a cultural environment where international literature (Tolstoj, Dostoyevsky, Marquez, Kundera, Calvino, Hemingway) is unknown, Arundhati Roy is considered a top model, and Hindi literature is not connected to names as Nirmal Varmā, Alkā Sarāvgī, and Vinod Kumār Śukla, but restricted to a 'classical feudalism' recognizing only Medieval (*rāsau*, Ālam, Bodhā, Vidyāpatī, Sūrdās, Tulsīdās) and *rīti* (Ghanānand, Matirām, Bihārī, Dev) literature. In the academic organization, jobs are divided between the Left and the Right, and as for Hindi university departments and governmental institutions, they are full of brokers, compromisers, petty people using the system for personal gain.

The protagonist, whose name resembles that of Rāhul Sāṃkṛtyāyan (explicitly mentioned on page 20) studies the prescribed reading list, incidentally noticing that three out of three authors are Brahmans. And he cannot help stressing the fact that the textbook in use is Rāmcandra Śukla's *History of Hindi literature*, first published in 1929! He comments that studying Hindi is like travelling in a time machine: the present is simply cut off. Rāhul, though, has a different approach to literature: he mentions Lorca, Jan Otčenášek (in the Hindi translation by Nirmal Varmā), Nirālā, and Śamśer Bahādur Siṃh. And he appreciates the classic works of the Hindi canon not as a mark of pride in an ancient civilization, but always as referring to his current experience. For example, he reads Hazārī Prasād Dvivedī's classic novel *Anāmdās kā pothā* as the *Bildungsroman* of a young man, finding in it a mirror of his own feelings and experiences. Love is a strong vehicle of self-fulfilment and of achieving a meaningful life, as individuals think, co-relate, and exist only through the relations they form with each other. The novel's hero is a young sage who passes through diverse experiences and experiments led by his insatiable desire for knowledge, and who is transformed from a self-indulgent sage into a responsible social being, sensitive to the truth of human existence around him.

The mention of Hazārī Prasād Dvivedī does not happen by chance, but rather suggests a deviation from the canon as established by Rāmcandra Śukla. Hazārī Prasād Dvivedī, in fact, proposed a very different notion of literature than Śukla's: in his opinion literature had to be studied in connection with all other forms of art, from painting to music and dance, as well as in connection to other forms of knowledge, be they history or science. Literary and poetic conventions, as well as myths and modes, are the tools for knowing the cultural heritage of India that has been formed through centuries long process. According to Hazārī Prasād Dvivedī, in order to understand literary texts it is necessary to know the culture and history of the place. Only this allows us to embrace modernity with enthusiasm. In Hazārī Prasād Dvivedī's novels, fiction writer and scholar coincide; they act together in order to create a story in which imagination is organically grafted onto a well-defined cultural framework. Reality and fiction are linked and they give rise to a philosophical rethinking of reality and values. This is also what happens in *Mohan Dās* and *Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī*.

Another poet referred to frequently by Uday Prakāś is Nirāla. In *Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī* (139–140) there is a reference to the poem *Rām kī śakti pūjā*, in particular to some verses that seem to hint at the poet's desperate existential condition (Rubin 2005: xxxi–xxxiv)

> A curse on this life that's brought me nothing but frustration!
> A curse on this discipline for which I've sacrificed!
> Janaki! Beloved, alas, I could not rescue you!
> But Rama's spirit, tireless, was of another sort...
> that knew not meekness, knew not how to beg... (Rubin 2005: 49)
> […]
> And Ravana, Ravana, vile wretch, committing atrocities (Rubin 2005: 45)

This hero's attitude is the same as the one we find in *Mohan Dās*'s concluding sketch, where a thirty-year-old Rāghav (an epithet of Rām) is shown continuing his fight even when he knows he will never win.

As I said, there are three characters/actors in *Mohan Dās* who overtly refer to Hindi writers, and are actively engaged in helping the protagonist: Gajānand Mādhav Muktibodh, Śamśer Bahādur Siṃh, and Hariśaṅkar Parsāī. Interestingly enough, none of them received the credit they deserved during their lifetimes. In the story they are depicted as honest and dutifully working for justice, as rare examples of non-corrupt public officials, viz. a judge, a public prosecutor, and a senior superintendent of police (SSP). Gajānand Mādhav Muktibodh, Judicial Magistrate First Class, Anūppūr (MP) lives alone in a flat full of books where time seems to have frozen: the clock is still, and on the wall is a calendar of the year 1964 — Muktibodh died in September 1964 — showing Gaṅgādhar Tilak with a turban. Another disembodying element appears when the judge puts a hand on Harṣavarddhan Sonī's shoulder: "He felt as if that hand had no weight at all: a handmade of paper, flowers, dream, or language". This character is described resembling the poet Muktibodh (Prakāś 2009: 74–78): he is a Marathi but his Hindi is wonderful, he smokes *bīṛīs*, suffers from a cough and is short of breath, drinks strong tea, speaks with a throaty voice, and is restless and nervous.[6] The fictional character is an isolated man, whose postings are always in remote areas where he cannot disturb the interests of economically or politically powerful people. In the room, legal codes and books lie on a shelf, and do not appear to have been opened for years. On the contrary, other books are lying everywhere, with open pages, pencils, cards, or tree leaves inserted as bookmarks, as if to mark his most beloved passages or else the ones he reads often. Two portraits hang on the wall: Gandhi and Marx. In a corner stands a statue of Gaṇeś, another hint of Muktibodh's Marathi identity. It is easy to recognise some of the favourite elements of Muktibodh's poetry; his magnum opus *Āṁdhere meṃ* is a synthesis of them and, interestingly enough, in this long poem Muktibodh seems to be a private detective in search of the solution of a mystery, just as judge Muktibodh solves the case through a secret enquiry. Finally, on receiving the news of Muktibodh's sudden death by brain haemorrhage (Prakāś 2009: 83), we find that when he died he was with his inseparable friend Nemicand Jain[7] and Congress Party minister Śrīkānt Varmā.[8] Finally, the identification between poet Muktibodh and judge Muktibodh is also realized through the reproduction of his speech: when judge Muktibodh phones Harṣavarddhan Sonī he calls him 'partner', using the epithet that poet Muktibodh reserved for his friends.

Śamśer Bahādur Siṃh and Hariśaṅkar Parsāī are minor actors in the story, but their role in making possible the arrest of the culprits is crucial. Śamśer Bahādur

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[6] See Muktibodh's description by Hariśaṅkar Parsāī, quoted in Śarmā 1978b: 202.

[7] Actually poet, playwright, and critic Nemicand Jain's family took care of Muktibodh when he was in a coma at the hospital; he himself later edited *Muktibodh racnāvalī*.

[8] Śrīkānt Varmā (1931–1986) attended Nagpur University on Muktibodh's recommendation, receiving his MA in Hindi in 1956 and had careers in both literature and politics, becoming a member of the Rajya Sabha on a Congress (I) ticket in 1976, and later on becoming an official and spokesman of the party in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Siṃh acts as narrator of the agitated events of the night when judge Muktibodh proceeded with his private investigation. In the narration there is a further reference to an outsider of Hindi literature: the house in Lenin Nagar where the usurper Bīsnāth urf Mohan Dās lives is close to *Maṭiyānī Cauk*. Rāmeś Siṃh Maṭiyānī "Śaileś" (1931–2001) had a rich literary production of high level, but mainstream critics have mostly ignored him because of his ideologically radical views and he died in poverty, ignored and abandoned. His literary production deals particularly with dislocated *dalit*s who move to urban landscapes where they achieve no integration, living and dying on the city sidewalks. These characters are beggars, pickpockets, marginalised individuals, destined to be victims of a society proceeding towards "progress". Notwithstanding social and human degradation, they nevertheless maintain their own inner life, hope, and the strength to hold on.

Other characters' names hint at the literary field: Mohan Dās's son Devdās obviously refers to Śaratcandra's masterpiece; advocate Sonī's first name is Harṣavarddhana, recalling the Hindū ruler[9] who was a patron of literature and Buddhism. His court poet was Bāṇabhaṭṭa, the creator of *Harṣacarita* and *Kādambarī*, credited as being one of the primary historical sources for the period and as one of the first novels ever written. Bāṇabhaṭṭa was a writer who defied all norms and established ways of writing poetry in his times, and had equal numbers of admirer and critics. Incidentally he is also the protagonist of *Bāṇabhaṭṭa kī ātmakathā*, the classic Hindi novel by Hazārī Prasād Dvivedī narrating how perilous was the life of a poet — an unconventional one — amidst the politics of the day, a life bound by the social customs and a desperate need to earn a livelihood, a thirst to create an audience for his work.

Uday Prakāś's canon is established in the margins of the mainstream canon, based on a firm non-conformism that centres on writers like Bertolt Brecht, Federico Garcia Lorca, Muktibodh, and Nirālā. Why should anyone break the set norms in any society, in any field? What does it mean to be a rebel writer, a protracted, relentless proof of satire and parody? Why be the underground of dominant literature, the starting point rather than the accomplished result? The answer coming from these texts is that literature is given the role of speaking truth in a world where everything seems oriented around the triumph of untruthfulness. In our contemporary world, philosophies and ideologies may have been overcome, but the urge for justice is eternal. Therefore civil society still maintains hope, against the apparently unstoppable overwhelming and overbearing power of market, capital, and politics. That is the reason why Muktibodh, a mix of Brecht and Kafka smoking *bīṛīs*, long dead from a brain haemorrhage, can become an empirical reality just before the final judgment. The character looking for justice is the Author — more precisely the anti-author versus the establishment author — that is the persona of Uday Prakāś himself. The man telling the truth in the contemporary world is not the wondering sage or the mystic, but the visionary, acidic, and sharp-witted committed writer.

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[9] Harṣhavarddhana (r. 606–647) rose to power in North India after the decline of the Gupta Empire, and ruled from Kannauj and Thanesar (now a small town in Haryana).

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Parody as positive dissent in Hindi theatre

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Abstract

Parody (etymologically a voice alongside another voice) involves imitation, but what is crucial is the co-presence of these two voices, the parodying and the parodied. It is the dialogue between two enunciative spheres, two utterances, hence its preeminent position in the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism. The two points of view, set against each other dialogically, represent two utterances, speakers, styles, languages, and axiological systems, even if they issue from a single speaker. As a reflexive device and critical manipulation of canonized forms, parody has often been considered as the epitome of postmodernism in European and North American literature and artistic expression. The paper aims to show that, in Hindi theatre, parody is politically significant. The article focuses on Bhartendu Hariścandra (1850—1885) and Habīb Tanvīr (1923—2009). It argues that the use of the quotes of Nazīr Akbarābādī in Tanvīr's most famous play *Āgrā Bāzār*, a poet who himself parodies the traditional poetical canons, enhances a literary reflexivity that is one of the deepest creative devices of Indian culture.

Keywords: Habib Tanvir, Bhartendu, postmodernity, reflexivity, parody, canonized form, popular culture, marketplace culture

There is a famous aphorism by Nietzsche in *Daybreak* (*Morgenröte*) which has often been quoted to emphasize that parody cannot be dissociated from modern culture as characterized by (auto) reflexivity. It also suggests that parody rules out any dream or phantasm relating man to a divine origin, and generally to any phantasm of origin. Here is the piece:

> "One sought to awake the feeling of man's sovereignty by showing his divine birth: it is now a forbidden path; for, at the door, there is the monkey"[1]

Looking for his origin, man finds the monkey, his ancestor, who is at the same time his imitator: this makes man's origin inextricably linked to imitation, and imitation an alternative for the divine, in terms of origin.

Parody does indeed involve imitation, even if etymologically it simply means "a song/discourse (*odos*) alongside (*para*) another one" – the word itself *parodia* is attested since ancient Greek with the meaning "counter-song". This voice alongside another voice is rarely a bare imitation (the latter usually considered "pastiche") and is more often a counter voice. This view of parody as a powerful device for criticizing highly repressive "theological" societies was indeed the first strong theory of parody with Bakhtin's analysis of what he calls "carnival" in medieval societies, particularly French, with his pioneering study of Rabelais and folk culture, but also in all kinds of Western cultures at various points in their history. At the same time, Bakhtin himself insists on the ambivalence of parody and carnival: although highly subversive, carnival is consecrated by the tradition – both social and ecclesiastic (1968: 5) for a prescribed duration of time. These popular festivals, authorized by church authorities, while consistently opposing the "serious" official and normative culture and transgressing the accepted values, often including violent parody of the official norms, also posit these very norms that they contest. As pointed out by Linda Hutcheon (1984: 15), in an essay interestingly titled "Authorized Transgression", "parody posits, as a pre-requisite to its very existence, a certain aesthetic institutionalization which entails the acknowledgement of recognizable, stable forms and conventions". Its ambivalence consists in the fact that it posits and at the same time de-posits: it subverts by recognizing the forms of legitimacy in order to de-legitimize them.[2] This is in conformity with the formal features of the parodic discourse: what is crucial is the co-presence of two voices, the parodying and the parodied, two enunciative spheres, two utterances, hence its eminent position in the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism. "The two points of view are not mixed but set against each other dialogically" (Bakhtin 1981: 360), they represent "two utterances, two speakers, two styles, two 'languages, two semantic and axiological systems" (304), even if the parodied "belongs, by its grammatical and compositional markers, to a single speaker". An exact quotation can be a parody in certain contexts, but usually the parodying involves some modification of the parodied, which can be a text, a genre, a theme, a discursive style.[3] As a reflexive device and critical manipulation of canonized forms, parody has often been considered the epitome of postmodernism (Hutcheon 2002) in European and North American literature and artistic expression.[4]

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[1] Aphorism 49. A formulation used as a subtitle in the collective work *Pour une théorie de la Parodie: Le singe à la porte* (*For a Theory of Parody: the Monkey at the Door*" (Groupar ed.), Peter Lang, 1984.

In Indian literature, particularly Hindi literature, parody does not enjoy the same popularity as it does in Europe, nor has literary criticism been much interested in it – pastiche is a something else if we think of the much talked about but isolated book by Jaydev, *The Culture of Pastiche*.[5]

However, there are quite a few examples, particularly in the theatrical genres. Apart from the unique case of K.B. Vaid, whose theatre makes a highly original use of parody and auto-parody,[6] street theatre for instance (*nukkaṛ nāṭak*), a radical theatre of protest, makes generous use of parody, particularly of styles and types of discourse (parody of religious discourse and preaching, of political discourse, of vain intellectual quests in the parody of absurd theatre, etc.[7]), mostly used as a critical device explicitly aimed at subverting or destroying the dominant structures and norms voiced by the parodied.

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[2] It is also ambivalent in another sense, which Bakhtin also recognizes, for it may be essentially destructive/reductive and merely polemical, aiming exclusively at debasing the parodized object (negative parody), or it may propose new forms of regeneration out of the old models, aiming at a dialectical restructuration (positive parody).

[3] For parody of a genre or theme, see M. Riffaterre 1984.

[4] Although the first and widely commented example of parody in modern European literature, Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, has often be deemed to signify the birth of modernity.

[5] The notion of "pastiche" is rightly emphasized by the title, since the writers he stigmatizes for embodying a "culture of pastiche" are, according to him, sterile imitators of the Western culture, totally disconnected from the indigenous culture (a stigmatization, by the way, that is most questionable with most of his examples).

[6] His play *Parivār akhāṛā* ("Family as fighting arena") is analyzed in Montaut 2012.

One of the most ancient and famous uses of parody, elaborated on the basis of the farcical techniques of the Parsi theatre in the mid 19th century theatre is to be found in Bhartendu's major farce (*prahasana*), *Andher Nagrī* (1881), "The City of Darkness". The play opens with a low-keyed parody of the sadhus' hierarchy and language. One of the disciples, sent by their Mahant to nearby towns to beg, arrives at the bazaar of Andher Nagri – whose king is insane (*caupaṭ rājā*) — and he discovers to his utmost surprise that every vegetable, fruit, sweetmeat is sold for the same price, "one penny a pound", *ek ṭakkā ser*. He listens to the sellers who glorify their goods in a very funny way, some of them simply a realistic imitation of the popular culture prevailing in any bazaar of that time, since amplification, a well-known device of parody, is also a common feature of popular culture and particularly of the shouting to advertise one's goods in the bazaar. But some of them insidiously start subverting the genre of the street sellers' shouting, for instance the *pacakvālā*, seller of digestive powder, who mentions as his regular customers the whole city of Benares, from prostitutes of all ranks to the highest nobility, doctors, landlords, soldiers, and sahibs, before adding to the list the police superintendent who finds great help in the powder for easy digestion of the bribes he has to swallow; and then the British, who can digest the whole of Hindustan with the help of the magic powder. And as an extra piece of attractive information, the *pacakvālā* adds that his *cūran* (digestive powder) may have a Hindustani name (*uskā nām hindustānī*) but works as a foreign thing (*uskā kām vilāytī*). After a whole array of more or less parodized sellers, the *jātvālā* arrives as a final experience for the disciple: he sells castes, and can, according to the wish of the customer, have a Dhobi made into a Brahman, a Christian into a Muslim, and a Brahman into a Christian, lie into truth, evil into virtue, highest into lowest, lowest into highest; he can sell the four Vedas, all that "for a penny" (*ṭakke ke vāste*).

This is funny, but fun is also meaningful: parody stigmatizes the norm of this very particular bazaar and generally of the whole system underlying city life. Where there is no real price, where everything, rare or common, sacred or trivial, is sold for the same price, then all amounts to sheer arbitrariness and a distortion of the very principle of economic value and market, a meaning made obvious in the following act, a parody of arbitrary justice in the Nawab's court. Within ten minutes a dozen guilty persons, in an affair of a goat crushed by a tumbling wall, appear before the court and disappear after they have quickly shifted the blame onto the next fellow, in identical terms,[8] each on to the next, until the last one, the poor disciple. Why? Because of the cheap sweets, the poor chap has become fat, so he is the only fat resident of this city of meagre people all ravaged by fear, the only one with a thick enough neck to be hanged in the place of the one finally sentenced, unlike the skinny *kotwāl*, too thin to be hanged. In the court episode, there is a clear denounciation of the rotten kingdom ruled by absolute and crazy authority. The nawab is the main parodic character, Mughal justice (and covertly despotic rule in general, including British rule), the parodized system, but also parodied are the plaintiffs and the accused, whose single reaction is to dismiss any responsibility in a mechanical chain of "it's not me it's he".[9]

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[7] Good examples of the first: *Bakrī* by Sarveshdayal Saxena, staged by the Janam Theatre of Safdar Hashmi in 1974; of the combination of all: *Nāṭak nahīṃ*, or *Firangī lauṭ āe* by Azgar Vazāhat, etc. A novel like *Rāg dārbārī* by Shri Lal Shukla also combines features of parody, irony, and satire more creatively than in the classical instances (Harishankar Parsai) of what is presented as the tradition of satire in Hindi literature.

[8] *Merā koī kasūr nahīṃ / merā koī doṣ nahīṃ.*

The nawab, and through him, despotic rule, is stigmatized, which is not the case with the street sellers of the market place. The advertising shouts in the market, a multilayered parody, do not so clearly denounce anarchy and insanity. First, apart from the immediate purpose which, like the court sequence, is to make people laugh, there is the spontaneous parody which draws on the "natural" exaggeration and overstatement of the seller, frequently hinting at trivial interpretations of folk culture and obscene understatements (fish and orange-selling women). Then there is the theatrical treatment, which amplifies (stylization, repetition) the "normal" exaggeration while also making it into a covert political criticism and thereby transgressing the limits of acceptability in a "normal" marketplace (seller of castes, of digestive powder). Then there is the dramatic setting itself, that is, the author's voice and "belief" which is indirectly suggested in the comical leitmotiv *Caupaṭ Rājā*, the anonymous King of Mess.[10] Far from being a degrading parody of popular culture, the parodying text in the scene at the bazaar expands the potential of the parodied market advertising style to the point of absurdity in order to make it obvious that something is rotten in the kingdom. The scene in the *darbar*, a simpler parody with a clear target – to debase the drunken nawab whose tongue always twists[11] – is aimed at ridiculing the court idiom and system, which helps in our reading of the more complex sequence in the bazaar.

The "serious" version of Bhartendu's "belief" is well known, for instance through his famous discourse in Balia, which expressed ambivalence regarding the British rule and ideology (Dalmia 1997, 2006), but here, the stigmatization of the nawab culture of leisure that eschews real work, of superstition and laziness, is both stronger and bolder.

Another play from the 20th century contains a similar bazaar sequence also introduced by singing sadhus. *Āgrā Bāzār* by Habib Tanvir (1954) is indeed entirely set in the bazaar and consists exclusively of verbal exchanges in the public place, the locus of folk culture. First staged in Jamia Milia with students, university staff, villagers from Okhla – a not yet urban village at the time – a real *pānvālā* and a real

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[9] Mechanicity works here both as a trigger of laughter (a classic analysis since Bergson, well implemented in Chaplin's famous film *The Great Dictator*), and as a mimetic representation of the legal procedure depicted as a purely formal machine.

[10] British censorship was becoming strict with a law recently having been passed for checking theatrical presentations.

[11] *Bakṛī* comes out as *lakṛī, laṛkī, barkī*, an indication of his drunkenness, like his inability to correctly understand what is said (in *pān khāie* he hears the terrible name of *Surpankhā* the *rākṣasī*), and triggers laughter as in any farce, but also suggests a deeper inability to speak to the point and understand the basic complaints of the people.

barfvālā (sellers of betel and ice cream), an Okhla donkey, and workers from Tughlakabad, the play was subsequently taken to Delhi. In his various interviews and introductions to the play, Habib Tanvir does not mention Bhartendu, but comments at length on his debt to Nazir. Nazir Akbarabadi, an Urdu poet from the 19th century (supposed to have lived more than hundred years, dying in 1835), is practically never cited as a great poet or studied in the so-called wilderness between Mir and Ghalib. He wrote in all the genres codified in Urdu poetry, including the most celebrated *ghazal, qasīdā, marsīyā,*and *masnavī*. But what fascinates Habib Tanvir is Nazir's *nazmeṃ*, pieces of variable length in a poetic genre more fluid than the *ghazal*, with rhymed metrical verses, which maintain the same theme, unlike the *ghazal* in which each verse is autonomous. In *Āgrā Bāzār*, a play indeed dedicated to Nazir although initially the author was thinking of a tragic play on Insha,[12] Nazir is lavishly quoted. He is not parodied unless we consider that the delegation of his original voice to a variety of secondary utterers (fakirs, the cucumber-seller, the sweets-seller, hijra, the little girl, the kite-seller) represents a parodic treatment. But he himself to a large extent was also a parodist.

Habib Tanvir rates him so very highly because he sees him as the embodiment of Indian popular culture, in Urdu or Hindi (1954: 6). At a time when the most celebrated form of poetry, the *ghazal*, was deeply indebted to the Persian structure, imagery, lexicon, *topoi* and feelings, with no reference at all to the Doab or Hindustan, Nazir appears as the true poet of Indian culture, with his copious use of simple and trivial words related to material culture, his bold treatment of realities unknown at that time to high poetry, and properly Indian (*bandar, bhālū, totā, roṭī, paisā, khincāvaṭ, ciṛhāvaṭ*), his knowledge of the technical names of material culture (twenty denominations of kites). Such formal and thematic qualities make Nazir in Habib Tanvir's eyes the great voice of popular Hindustani culture, whether Urdu or Hindi (1954: 28). As the central figure of the play, he embodies the folk culture's resistance to the ever gloomier atmosphere entailed by the new political setting in the 1810 city of Agra city, with the British taking advantage of the weak local rulers, which led to chaos and increasing poverty. The transformation of this deep dissent into resilience is achieved in Nazir's *nazm* through a polymorphic use of parody at various levels.

Opening the play, the first *nazm* of Nazir, sung by the fakirs, sets the tone with a fragment of Nazir's *śāh āśob* (1954: 47—8):

> My words no longer have their usual grasp
> My speech has begun to alter and trip
> I am always in a sad thoughtfulness caught
> And my poetry has virtually come to a halt
>
> All around only misery, suffering and deprivation
> Whom should one weep over, whom should one mention
> (*kiskiske dukh ko roye aur kisī kahe bāt*)
> (…)

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[12] And transformed this project into the one on Nazir and Agra to answer a proposal from Jamia Milia for a celebration of Nazir.

> Jewellers, traders, and other wealthy gents
> Who thrived by lending, are now mendicants
> (*dete the sab ko naqd, so khāte haiṃ ab udhār*)
> The shops are deserted, dust lies on counter and scale
> (*bāzār meṃ uṛe haiṃ paṛī xāk beśumār*)
> While desolate shopkeepers wait like captives in jail.
> (*baiṭhe haiṃ yūṃ dukānoṃ meṃ apnī dukāndār*)

Poverty has destroyed what once was a lovely city

> Call me a lover or doting slave (*asīr*), I am Agra's native
> Call me mullah or learned knave (*dabīr*), Agra is where I live
> Call me poor or call me fakir (*fakīr*), I am Agra's native
> Call me poet or simply *Nazīr*, Agra is where I live.

Is there any parodic dimension in this *nazm*, which expresses a real dissent regarding the economic and political state of the city? Deploring the inner emptiness and difficulty of verbal expression may be a common topic in the poetry of the time, but the way it is related to the dire economic situation of the town is new, and the way it is depicted, almost comically through its triviality, adds to the contrast with the classical canons of elegiac lament, particularly the depiction of the grocers in front of their empty dusty counters. The main innovation is the general *topos,* voiced in everyday language, of human physical misery, a prosaic and trivial *topos* never to be tackled in the high standards of that times' poetry. These standards are humorously emphasized by the signature of the poem, in four lines full of alliterations and inner rhymes involving some sophisticated Persian or Arabic words. The fact that mendicants utter it is, of course, an extra device of parody, since it also serves to express the anxiety of having no place to ask for charity while pursuing their religious vocation (*kiskis ke dukh roye, kiskī kahe bāt*).

Similarly, in the crucial and long expected *nazm* on the cucumber (*kakṛī*), parody first results from the contrast between a very prosaic object and its metrical treatment, not to mention the poetic metaphors or literate allusions.[13] It occurs at the end of the play, after the *kakṛī* seller, since the beginning of the play, has repeatedly asked Nazir for a poem in order to sell better. In the interim, a quasi riot ensues from the rivalry of sellers equally selling badly in the opening scene, which becomes the argument of the play. At the end of act one, the constable arrives to enquire about the "riot" and look for the guilty, then he reappears in the last sequence, when the song is heard (Tanvir 1954: 106).

> O how wondrous are the *kakṛīs* of Agra,
> (*kyā pyārī-pyārī mīṭhī aur patlī-patliyāṃ*)
> How slender and delicate, how lovely to behold,
> Like strips of sugarcane or threads of silk and gold,
> (*gāne kī poriyāṃ, reśam kī takliyāṃ*)
> Like Farhad's liquid eyes or Shirin's slender mould,
> Like Laila's shapely fingers, or Majnun's tears cold.

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[13] An inverse burlesque, since originally burlesque draws from the contrast between the dignity and the grandeur of the character or the topic treated and the triviality of description.

O how wondrous are the *kakṛīs* of Agra.
(*kyā khūb narmā-nāzuk is āgre kī kakṛī*
The best of course are those of Iskandra
(Aur jismeṃ khās kāfir iskandre kī kakṛī)
Some are pale yellow and some lush green
(*koī harī-bharī haiṃ*);
Topaz and emeralds in their lustre and sheen,
Those that are round are Heer's bangles green,
Straight ones like Ranjha's flute ever so keen.
O how wondrous are the *kakṛīs* of Agra;
Crunchy and crisp though tender to touch,
(*chūne meṃ burg-e-gul, khāne meṃ kurkurī*)
In beating the heat, the *kakṛīs* helps much;
Cools the eyes, soothes the heart, I can vouch,
Call it not *kakṛīs*, it's a miracle as such.
O how wondrous are the *kakṛīs* of Agra

In the initial phrasing of the seller himself, when he tries to advertise the qualities of his kakri, the Sikandra/Iskandra origin is present, as well as the silky quality – *reśam kī tarah mulāyam*, or the lush green – *harī-bharī* – and freshness or sweetness – *tāzā, mīṭhī*. The spontaneous exaggeration, involving metaphors and alliterations, of the "normal" publicity in the market, is simply enriched by Nazir (for instance the original *mīṭhī* "sweet" is expanded into the sugarcane comparison, and *reśam* "silk" set into a rhymed pattern with *takliyāṃ/ patliyāṃ/ haṃsliyāṃ/ ūṃgliyāṃ*) and overdone in the literary treatment. Here it is enriched by specifically literary allusions, among which the commonplace Laila-Majnun reference, a cliché in Persian culture; the way it is used here as a simile results in parody when the freshness of Majnun's tears is compared to the juicy cucumber in a burlesque contrast, developing the Persian reference to Farhad's liquid eyes[14]. As for the Panjabi reference to Hir-Ranjha, a lyric ballad which belongs both to high and folk culture, it sets the whole high literary referential pattern into a *deshi* frame, similarly reminiscent of a tragic and romantic love story. The humour emerges from the association of these incompatible spheres (the '"low"/material's depiction involves features of the "high"/spiritual referents). Rather than debasing great legends and Romanesque culture, such treatment introduces them into the world of daily life as a marker of complicity and familiarity, in a continuum between shared *deshi* folk culture (Hir-Ranjha), shared foreign culture (Laila-Majnun), and lesser known foreign culture (Farhad-Shirin).

The letter to the grocer, a celebration of rat chutney, is a masterpiece of the "bouffon" style, more explicitly making fun of the usual ways for sellers to advertise their goods, by substituting disgusting ingredients for the regular ones and giving them the high status of exquisite refinement, in the manner of "grotesque" style: Nazir found a rat in the *acār* brought back by his granddaughter, and sends it back with this *nazm* (Tanvir 1954: 76), in a very common language with no literary allusions and no other parodic formal signal than rhyme and metrical verse (usually a signal for "high" *topoi*):

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[14] Majnun is the male hero of tragic love, like Farhad in both Persian lyrics, Laila and Shirin are their respected beloveds. In the Panjabi lyrical epic, Hir is the female beloved and Ranjha the male lover.

Again there is a market for rats these days!
(*phir garam huā ānke bāzār cūhoṃ kā*)
I too have prepared them in various ways!
(*hamne bhī kiyā khvācā taiyyār cūhoṃ kā*)
I chop I pound and I mash three or four
And make such a mix that you'll ask for more!
My rat pickle is the pride of any store!
(*kyā zor mazedār hai acār cūhoṃ kā*)

The rats that I choose are large and fat
(*avval to cūhe chāṭe hue qad ke baṛe haiṃ*)
Each frog I add is the size of a cat
(*aur ser savā ser ke meṃḍhak bhī paṛe haṃ*)
Deliciously crisp and spicy and hot
(*cakh dekh mere yār, ye ab kaise kaṛe haiṃ*)
Judge for yourself how well they have rot!
(*cālīs baras guzre haiṃ tab aise saṛe haiṃ*)
Its price is rising, is sure to rise more
(*āge jo banāyā to bikā bīs rupae ser!*
barsāt meṃ bikne lagā paccīs rupae ser
jāṛoṃ meṃ yah biktā rahā battīs rupae ser)
My rat pickle is the pride of any store

Apart from the vitriolic satire of price inflation at the end, responsible for people's misery, the main purpose of the song is to make people laugh – and it works: the grocer laughs without control (*beqābū haṃsī*) when reading the letter, before it is sung. Robust laughter, as an expression of free life, is indeed a constitutive marker of popular culture, along with the language of trivial and daily realities, and what is consistently parodied in the play is the *ghazal* culture, its romantic and desperate sadness, its abstraction and esoteric imagery.

There is one single *ghazal* in the play, and it is sung by Hamid at the bookseller's shop, a place where conservative lovers of classical poetry congregate, including a Poet, a *tazkīrānavīs* or Chronicle-writer, busy writing a compilation of all great Urdu poets, all of whom despise Nazir's poetry for its vulgarity, petty puns, and stupid *topoi*, which should not appear in poetry. The *ghazal* says (Tanvir 1954: 88):

Messenger, go tell her without mentioning me,
The one who loves you is dying, so sick is he.
The moment in anger she went away from me,
Why didn't lightning strike me and I cease to be.
It must be she who goes out all dressed at this hour,
From her radiant face alone can issue the light I see
No one shed tears as I wandered in the wilderness,
(*sahrā meṃ mere hāl pe koī bhī na royā*)
Except blisters on my feet which wept openly.
(*gar phūṭ ke royā to mere pāṃv kā chālā*)
When others fell she rushed to help them up again,
But when I fell there was neither help nor sympathy.
Ah, Nazir, we advised you but you listened not,
You perused the book of love too keenly.

Although it is by Nazir, and employs a simple language far from the canonized standards of the literate poetry in Urdu circles, the *ghazal* is (reluctantly[15]) appreciated, mostly for the simile of the weeping blister. But this simile immediately leads to a kind of poetic contest, with everyone quoting a still better treatment of it. It starts with Mir:

> Thorns in that wilderness are still bathed in blood,
> Where blisters on my feet had burst and wept openly
> (*jis daśt meṃ phuṭā hai mere pāṃv kā chālā*)

and continues with Insha,[16] who "too has played creatively with this image, listen to this":

> Make me wander so, through the harsh wilderness of love
> That blister of tears **on the feet of my eyes** wept openly.
> (*hai* ***pāe-naẓar meṃ*** *bhī paṛā aśk kā chālā*)

Sauda, Mustafi, and Atish are mentioned, the latter glorified for his highbrow poetry ("there is no room for the abject, we are all kings and queens"). Now, for all such listeners, there is certainly no parody involved in Nazir's verse on the weeping blister, there is simply a good topos already consecrated by a series of great poets, yet inferior in its treatment to Mir's or Insha's who have more complex and far-fetched ways of introducing the topos in a more persianized language. But for the audience, and probably the people in the bazaar, it is parodical, regardless of Mir or Insha, and Jawed Malick's beautiful translation into English reads in this manner. Besides, the Companion – a nonconformist friend of the very conformist Poet – elsewhere criticizes the *ghazal* for lacking scope, and is severely blamed by the Poet for daring to attack centuries-old traditions of Iranian and Hindustani legacies.[17]

Elsewhere Mir is repeatedly described (59, 65, 69) as a disillusioned man, weary of life and disgusted with the dismal culture of his city (Delhi) to such an extent that he joined the recently opened Fort William College in Calcutta, where he was busy writing "the story of the four dervishes" for the British school. This mention of the famous *Bāg-o-bahār,* with a title clearly evocative of the Persian origin of the tale, along with his noble despair and wanderings, makes Mir a perfect embodiment of the *ghazal* culture that prevailed at that time in literate circles, and was radically opposed to the bazaar culture.

Nazir's *ghazal* is not treated as a parody by the main speaker and those embodying the old canons in poetry and culture; it is paralleled in this same context of reception, by other ghazals with the same simile, again not parodies in the original but on the contrary very serious and highbrow pieces of sophisticated poetry. The simile praised here however, particularly in Insha with its immediate co-text (*pāe-nazar*, "the feet of the eyes") is reset and commented upon in a scholastic and pedantic atmosphere which makes it a parodic epitome of the old sophisticated poetry for the audience in the bazaar and in the theatre hall.

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[15] "If one continues to try throughout his whole life, one is bound to stumble on a good piece of verse once in a while… One can find any number of third rate poets who are presumptuous enough to tread on the path of inimitable masters".

[16] The poet (and grammarian) on whom Habib Tanvir initially wanted to write his drama.

[17] *śu'arā-e-irān aur ustādzā-e-hind sādiyoṃ kī ravāytoṃ kā hamlā,* (Tanvir 1954: 62)

Nazir’s *ghazal* and its reception also serve as a counterpoint to the next *nazm*, sung by the kite-seller, and full of the joyful carelessness of the playful and sportive city of Agra, a very long song in everyday language, which begins as follows (Tanvir 1954: 90):

> The poor, the lowly, and persons of high degree,
> Every one in Agra swims and swims wonderfully!
> Some float with eyes closed, dozing all the way,
> Others hold cages, or on their head a popinjay (*totā*).
> Many swim flying kites, or stringing a bead.
> Some smoke hookahs, and look happy indeed,
> Such marvellous things they do, and do so easily,
> Everyone in Agra swims, and swims wonderfully!

After the first couplet, the chronicle-writer leaves in indignation, but passers-by begin to gather and enjoy listening, while the Poet too is furious about the piece's lack of urban culture (*śahar meṃ nahīṃ paṛhā*), bad diction (cucumber munching like), and marketplace writing (*bāzārī qalām*). After all the supporters of noble culture have left the shop, a *holi* song is heard (again a *nazm* from Nazir), as a joyful expression of popular freedom, lust for life, and direct sensuousness, welcoming sexual desire and obscene allusions without any romanticization:

Upon hearing that, the kite-seller delivers a serious *ars poetica*, by means of the story of the scholar who, after having taught his disciple learned sophisticated poetry for years, finally told him, now you go and wander through the streets and marketplaces and find out if there is a relation between what I taught you and what you hear there. The young poet goes, and then comes back, having seen no relation. He is sent again, and again comes back, having seen something like a vague relation. He is sent again. He comes back, illuminated: “there is nothing in the most ordinary everyday conversation which is not related to the art of poetry”. The implicit moral is that voices of both popular and learned culture, far from being separate, are or should be mutually enriching since they should speak the same language, that of real life. In this view, Nazir’s poetry is not parodic, either of the marketplace culture nor of high culture: although sung and heard in the book seller’s shop, it becomes an unauthorized transgression (except for the *ghazal*) not even conceivable from the ultra-conservative viewpoint, when sung in the marketplace it may trigger laughter and be appreciated as a joyful parody of high poetry.[18]

Nazir’s poetry voices the composite culture of the market place, including its “religious” aspects from all faiths. Krishna’s childhood for instance, which is commonly sung on the occasion of a birth by the eunuchs (Hijras), is depicted by the Hijras of the play in a very worldly way, gently humorous, but in no way destructive of the other “belief”. It rather re-sets within the witty popular familiarity of deities:

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[18] How can high poetry, known to be esoteric and to obey the restricted code (Bernstein) of an elite, be shared by the popular culture of the marketplace, a condition for appreciating some other piece as its parody? There surely was a representation among the people of what the high canons sound like as a genre (Riffaterre 1984). Even without full access to the rhetoric and to the lexical subtleties of the highly persianized ghazals, the rhythmic pattern and basic rhetoric is well enough known for them to enjoy the simple language in such a pattern as a healthy protestation against the restricted codes of the exclusive elite culture.

Milkmaids away, the little fellow had a field day
He stole into houses like a thief much skilled
Climbed on a cot and brought down the pot
That with cream or butter freshly filled
He ate some and wasted some
(*makhan, malāī, dūdh,* ***jo pāyā so khā liyā***)
And some he simply spilled
(*kuch khāyā* ***kuch kharāb kiyā, kuch girā diyā***)
Fabulous were Krishna’s childhood days
(*aisā thā bansūrī ke bajeyyā kā bālpan*)
So many tales of his naughty ways!
(***kyā-kyā kahūṃ maiṃ*** *kiśan kanhaiyyā kā bālpan*)[19]

Although serious criticism is also very much present, always tinted with humour and comedy,[20] the play ends with an apology for the multi-layered and contrasting nature of humankind, both at its best and worst, in a last *nazm* from Nazir, *ādmīnāmā*. This last song amounts to a suspension of judgment, an unusual re-appropriation of the most opposite behaviours and social status, defining man as multiple and humanity as unfathomable (*paṛhte haiṃ ādmī hī Qurān aur namāz yahāṃ aur ādmī hī unkī curāte haiṃ jūtiyāṃ* “the man who reads the Quran and preys in the mosque is indeed a man as is the man who steals his shoes”). We may read it as a passionate song of faith in humanity, or as a gently cynical acceptance of social and individual wickedness, or an expression of sceptical relativism. Habib Tanvir, who is the final utterer and speaker of a “new belief”, has extensively quoted from an uncommon poet who expressed faith in humanity even more than he criticized the prevailing norms. The critical parody of the prevailing canons in 1810 aims at debasing the elite culture which they embody because they leave no room for the creative and critical potential of folk culture which has the power of renewal. This statement is not Nazir’s. It is Habib Tanvir who implicitly says it, by depicting an atypical poet in his historical setting (cultural sterilization coincides with the loss of economic and political power in the late Mughal empire), in order, also, to voice dissent related to modern India. His is a political theatre of protest, with strong judgement and commitment, and he would not be satisfied with a mere celebration of the poet. The dramatic plot (the final discomfiture of the constable) and moreover the acting of the poems by characters who behave like the real vendors and some of whom are real vendors, modifies the original “message” conveyed by Nazir’s poetry, along with the Brechtian critical distance that Habib Tanvir always manages to create in his performances[21].

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[19] The particularly witty expressions are in bold characters, the last one possibly a parody of the coded phrase of all medieval poets confessing their inability to put in words the marvels they attempt to depict. But the reduplication of the interrogative *kyā* gives it a definitely popular tone, and similarly does the first expression in bold *kharāb kiyā*, “messed”.

[20] For instance: “Famed scholars, of themselves so sure,
Lose heart on becoming poor
Confused by hunger they begin to see (*muflīs hue to kalmā talak bhūl jāte haiṃ*)
Day as night and A as B (*pūche koī ‘alif’ to use ‘be’ batāte haiṃ*)

What then is the final "belief" that emerges from this way of handling quotation of a parodist/satirist poet, himself radiant with the *rasa* of folk culture? The dominant political and cultural norms may have failed to build a fair society, and the rich potential of folk culture can help counter this failure, which is in conformity with the very concept of his Naya Manch, a troupe of Chattisgarhi tribals, who later came to dominate the field of the contemporary protest theatre[22].

We may conclude that parody as handled in this play is not to be correlated with postmodernism (Hutcheon 2000) any more in Nazir and Habib Tanvir than in general in non-modern cultural traditions East or West (Rabelais, Aristophanes), unless we empty both notions of their vital content. The reflexivity, part of a more general trend of inner criticism, a feature inherent in modern and postmodern parody, is not only present but crucial in the Indian tradition right from the beginnings (Ramanujan 1989[1999], Ananthamurthy 2007). When we observe it in 20th century Indian literature, we may like to correlate this form of dissent to the postmodern condition and general scepticism (Lyotard 1979), but we should also be aware that reflexivity, critical distance, and dissent, the basic ingredients of parody, are not the exclusive products our post-industrial society.

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[21] For more details on the Brechtian distance in H. Tanvir, *cf.* Dalmia (1990), and Montaut 2012.

[22] His nation wise popularity, although his theatre was burnt down by fundamentalists in the nineties, was acknowledged by a national homage on his death in June 2009, when was buried draped in the national flag.

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Wie viel Lachen verträgt der Glaube? Urdu-Satiren in Pakistan[1]

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Abstract

Religious Topics in Urdu Satires from Pakistan

Before turning towards Pakistan, the Urdu tradition of a playful, humorous, or satirical treatment of attitudes toward religion is demonstrated with examples from ’Nazīr̤’ Akbarābādī (1740–1830), Mirzā Asadullāh K̲hān ’Ġālib’ (1797–1869), Akbar Illāhābādī (1846–1921), and Muẖammad Iqbāl (1877–1938), after which follows a brief discussion of three satirical authors whose texts were published in Pakistan between 1956 and 2001.

Nasīm H̱ijāzī (1914–1996), who is best known for his “Islamic” historical novels, wrote a satirical play on the futile attempts of secular, westernized urban intellectuals to wean simple country people off their religious and moral values. The background of his play *Ṣaqāfat kī talāś* (In search of culture, 1956/1959) was formed by discussions about the cultural identity of Pakistan in which he represented the stance of an exclusive reliance on religious unity, denying cultural, ethnic, and social differentiations. His urban intellectuals are ridiculed throughout. Sayyid Ẕamīr Ja^{c}frī (1916–1999), on the other hand, in his poems and columns, criticises religious hypocrisy, sectarian strife, and the use of religious rhetoric to mask corruption and misgovernment. Muśtāq Ahmad Yūsufī (born 1923), in his mock-autobiography *Zarguzaśt* (The fate of money, 1976), deals with aspects of urban life in the early years of Pakistan. The characters in his book display an attitude of “live and let live” in which respect for religious feelings is coupled with a mild disregard for ritualistic aspects of religious practice. Hence much of his writing is ironic rather than satirical. Similar attitudes prevail in later novels by a variety of Pakistani authors, but at the same time one can discern a growing tendency to ascertain and redefine Muslim identity, which seems to be a reaction to the Islamophobia rampant in Western media since 2001 as well as to the conflicts that are undermining the unity and legitimacy of the Pakistani state. (Paper based on a talk presented at a colloquium on “Islam and Satire” at the Asia and Africa Institute of Hamburg University in 2007)

Keywords: Urdu literature, comic relief, humorous treatment of religious topics, satirical poetry, witticisms, reformed Islam, parody, wordplay, religious identity

Die literarische Vorgeschichte

Die Urdu-Literatur ist in der glücklichen Lage, aus einem ungeheuer vielfältigen Erbe schöpfen zu können: aus der über 2000 Jahre alten indischen Literaturtradition, arabischen und persischen sowie regionalen Quellen. All diese literarischen Traditionen sind überaus reich an den verschiedensten Spielarten des Komischen. Satire, Parodie, Burleske, Ironie waren seit jeher Mittel, den Druck herrschender politischer, sozialer oder religiöser Zwänge zu erleichtern („comic relief“), Gesellschaftskritik zu üben oder sich über Zeitgenossen lustig zu machen.

Der humoristische, oft gar nicht zimperliche Umgang mit religiösen Autoritäten, den man aus anderen Literaturen der islamischen Welt kennt, ist auch in der

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[1] Der folgende Beitrag basiert auf einem Vortrag bei einer Tagung zum Thema „Islam und Satire“, die am 2. Februar 2007 am Asien-Afrika-Institut der Universität Hamburg stattfand. Es geht daher nicht um Satire allgemein, sondern um religiöse Themen in literarischen Satiren.

Urdu-Dichtung weit verbreitet. Beispiele lassen sich aus allen Epochen in großer Zahl finden. Ziele des Spottes sind in der Regel die Dummheit und Engstirnigkeit des Mullā, die Bigotterie und Heuchelei des Śaik̲h̲. Demgegenüber wird der Dichter (bzw. das lyrische Ich der Dichtung) als Träger wahrer religiöser Gefühle gefeiert. Religiosität und wahrer Glaube liegen im Herzen, nicht in Ritualen und äußerlichen Attributen. Hier zeigt sich der mystische Hintergrund vieler Gedichte, der aber auch zur reinen Konvention werden kann.

In der neueren Zeit tritt als ein weiteres Thema der Missbrauch religiöser Losungen für politische, d. h. Machtinteressen, durch geistliche Würdenträger hinzu. Ihr Wirken wird als ein Beitrag zur Erhaltung des Status Quo und gegen soziale Veränderungen gewertet.

Bevor wir uns jedoch dem 20. Jahrhundert zuwenden, mögen einige wenige Beispiele die satirische Tradition in der Urdu-Literatur illustrieren.

‚Naz̤īr' Akbarābādī (1740–1830) gehörte keinem Hof oder Sufi-Schrein an, verkehrte nicht in literarischen Zirkeln und hatte keinen poetischen Mentor. Neben den konventionellen Themen behandelt er in seinen Werken alltägliche Dinge (wie z. B. Brot), volkstümliche Feste und menschliche Verhaltensweisen. In dem Gedicht *K̲h̲uśāmad* (Schmeichelei) heißt es in der zweiten Strophe:

> Schmeichele, wenn du ein Anliegen hast,
> schmeichele auch, hast du keins,
> schmeichele den Propheten, den Heiligen und Gott,
> schmeichele allen, die dir nutzen können.

Und der Refrain lautet:

> Dem Schmeichler ist alle Welt geneigt,
> Dem Schmeichler ist selbst Gott geneigt. (259–260)[2]

Das Gottesbild dieser Verse wirkt sehr anthropomorph – wenn nicht körperlich, so doch geistig. Hier zeigt sich ein unbekümmerter, gelegentlich frivoler Umgang mit dem Göttlichen, der in der Urdu-Literatur nicht selten ist.

Ghalib (Mirzā Asadullāh K̲h̲ān ‚Ġālib', 1797–1869) gilt nicht nur als einer der größten Urdu-Dichter, sondern aller indischen Dichter des 19. Jahrhunderts. Noch ganz von der klassischen Tradition geprägt, lebte er doch in einem Zeitalter radikaler Veränderungen und Neuerungen. Seit Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts herrschten die Briten auch in seiner Heimatstadt Delhi, obwohl nominell der Mogulkaiser noch im Amt war. Ghalib registrierte alles Neue sehr aufmerksam. Er hatte viele Freunde unter der alten Delhier Aristokratie wie auch unter den Briten. Seine Briefe, die wahre Meisterwerke der Urdu-Prosa sind, zeichnen ein lebendiges Bild der Zeit und der Zeitgenossen. Unvergleichlich sind die Selbstironie und das Understatement seines Stils. Zahlreiche überlieferte Anekdoten beweisen seine Schlagfertigkeit und seinen Witz.

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[2] *apnā mat̤lab ho to mat̤lab kī k̲h̲uśāmad kījiye/aur na ho kām to us ḍhab kī k̲h̲uśāmad kījiye/ambiyā auliyā aur rab kī k̲h̲uśāmad kījiye/apne maqdūr ġarẕ sab kī khuśāmad kījiye//k̲h̲uśāmad kare khalq us se sadā raẕī hai/sac to yah hai ki k̲h̲uśāmad se k̲h̲udā rāẕī hai.*

Ghalib bekannte sich offen zu seinem Weingenuss. Als er nach dem indischen Aufstand von 1857–58 von einem britischen Offizier gefragt wurde, ob er Muslim sei, sagte er: „Ein halber.“ (…) „Wie das?“ (…) „Ich trinke Wein, aber Schweinefleisch esse ich nicht.“ (Narang: 309)[3]

Im Schlussvers eines Ghazals heißt es:

Diese mystische Erkenntnis, und dazu dein Stil, Ghalib –
wir hielten dich für einen Gottesfreund, wärst du nicht dem Wein so zugetan. (41)[4]

In vielen Ghazals bekennt er sich zu seinem Libertinertum:

Worum es mir im Paradies geht,
ist nichts außer dem roten, duftenden Wein. (159)[5]

Ich weiß um den Lohn des rechten Lebenswandels,
nur – meinem Wesen liegt er nicht.

Wie willst du vor die Kaᶜba treten, Ghalib,
jedoch – du kennst ja keine Scham! (144)[6]

In seinen Versen setzt sich Ghalib oft direkt mit Gott auseinander. Hier einige Beispiele:

Wer kann ihn sehen, ist er doch einzig und eins,
gäbe es auch nur den Hauch der Dualtät, liefe man ihm doch irgendwo über den Weg. (41)[7]

(Bemerkenswert ist in diesem Vers der saloppe, familiäre Tonfall, der sich in der bildhaften Redewendung *se do cār honā* äußert.)

Wenn außer dir nichts existiert,
wozu dann die ganze Aufregung, oh Gott? (144)[8]

Oder er äußert sich zum Konzept des Paradieses:

Ich weiß genau, was ich vom Paradies zu halten habe,
ein tröstlicher Gedanke, Ghalib, ist’s trotz alledem! (155)[9]

Ghalibs Dichtung ist voller Fragen und Zweifel, oft auch voller Verzweiflung und Düsternis, aber immer wieder erhellt von der beispiellosen Leichtigkeit seiner Ironie, die hier nur an wenigen Beispielen illustriert werden konnte.

Witze, lustige, oft auch derb-komische oder frivole Geschichtchen und Anekdoten bildeten seit jeher einen wichtigen Bestandteil der Unterhaltungskultur und der schriftlichen sowie mündlichen Überlieferung. Uns sind zahlreiche altindische Quellen erhalten, für das Urdu wurden aber die ersten Sammlungen derartiger Texte im 19. Jahrhundert zusammengestellt und gedruckt. Einige witzige, zum Teil sehr schlüpfrige Anekdoten bilden den Abschluss von Mīrs Autobiographie *Zikr-i Mīr* (1771–73, 1782), die er jedoch in persischer Sprache verfasste. Diese Anekdoten berichten freimütig und ohne moralisierenden Unterton von Ehebruch, Vergewaltigung, homoerotischer und Knabenliebe und anderen nicht durch die Scharia gedeckten Handlungen. Der gefoppte Dummkopf ist häufig ein Mullā oder *qāẓī* (eingedeutscht „Kadi“, Richter). Ähnlich obszöne Begebenheiten finden sich auch in einigen späteren Sammlungen, wurden aber seit dem Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts aus „respektablen“ Editionen getilgt und in den Bereich der *chapbooks* verdrängt.

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[3] *„ādhā.“ (...) „is kā kyā mat̤lab?“ (...) „śarāb pītā hū̃, su’ar nahī̃ khātā.“*
[4] *yah masā’il-i tas̲avvuf, yah tirā bayān Ġālib/tujhe ham valī samajhte, jo na bāda k̲h̲vār hotā.*
[5] *vah cīz, j̲is ke liye ham ko ho bihiśt ᶜazīz/sivāy bāda-i̲ gulfām-i muśkbū k̲yā hai!*
[6] *jāntā hū̃ s̲avāb-i t̤āᶜat-o-zuhd/par t̤abīᶜat idhar nahī̃ ātī//kaᶜbe kis mū̃h se jā’oge Ġālib!/śarm tum ko magar nahī̃ ātī!*
[7] *use kaun dekh sakt̲ā ki yagāna hai vah yaktā/jo du’ī kī bū bhī hotī to kahī̃ do cār hotā.*
[8] *jab ki tujh bin nahī̃ ko’ī maujūd/phir yah hangāma ai k̲h̲udā, kyā hai?*
[9] *ham ko maᶜlūm hai jannat kī h̲aqīqat, lekin/dil ke k̲huś rakhne ko Ġālib yah k̲h̲iyāl acchā hai.*

Die erwähnten Urdu-Sammlungen enthalten Texte aus allen möglichen Sanskrit-, Braj-Bhasha, persischen und arabischen Quellen. Stellvertretend sei hier nur auf einige wenige hingewiesen. Ein sehr aufwendig produzierter Band erschien 1850 unter dem Titel *Nau ratan* (Neun Juwelen) in Lucknow. Hierin sind in neun Kapiteln Texte unterschiedlichster Art versammelt. Die Kapitel 5–7 behandeln komische Begebenheiten, in denen oft ein *qāẓī* als Dummkopf lächerlich gemacht wird. So wird z. B. erzählt, dass ein *qāẓī* einen feuchten Traum hat. Er zieht sich die Hose aus und geht in den Hof, um sich zu waschen. Als eine Nachbarin erscheint, ruft ihm die Dienerin zu, er solle sich das Gedicht verdecken, damit er die Frau nicht sieht. Er schlägt sich also sein Hemd nach oben über den Kopf. Die arme Frau sieht ihn unten entblößt und beschimpft ihn gehörig. Als Fazit fragt der Erzähler, warum so ein Dummkopf *qāẓī* werden konnte (158–159). Ähnlich derb geht es in vielen Geschichten des Bandes *Laṭ̤ā’ifu-ẓ̤- ẓ̤arā’if* (Witzige Anekdoten, Lucknow 1265 H./ 1849) zu, in denen häufig religiöse Würdenträger verspottet werden und sich sogar der Prophet Muhammad mit seinen Gefährten witzige Wortduelle liefert. In einer Episode wird z. B. ein Mann verhaftet, der Instrumente zum Schnapsbrennen bei sich trägt. Ein Witzbold wendet ein, er trage die Instrumente des Ehebruchs an sich – ob er nun auch verhaftet werden müsse? Daraufhin lässt der Richter den Angeklagten frei. (24–25) Diese Geschichten sind allen, die sich mit arabischer und persischer Literatur beschäftigen, wohl vertraut. Sie zeugen von einem unverkrampften Umgang mit religiösen Themen und religiösem Personal und verweisen auf eine eher pragmatische Haltung. Was sie ebenfalls unter Beweis stellen, ist die hohe Wertschätzung der Schlagfertigkeit, eines wachen Geistes und der Fähigkeit, schwierige Situationen durch Lebensklugheit zu meistern. In dieser Grundeinstellung stimmen altindische, arabische und persische Quellen völlig überein. Sind es auf der einen Seite die Brahmanen, die verspottet werden, so sind es auf der anderen Mullahs, Kadis und Scheichs.

Im letzten Drittel des 19. Jahrhunderts wurde daneben die Auseinandersetzung mit der westlichen Kultur und Bildung und ihrer Übernahme durch die Zeitgenossen zu einem wichtigen Thema satirischer Literatur, so auch in den satirischen Versen des Dichters Akbar Illāhābādī (1846–1921)**.** Ein Gefühl der Demütigung und des Verlustes durchzieht all diese Gedichte. Hier ein paar Beispiele:

> Auf dem Weg nach Westen haben diese Burschen alles verloren:
> dort sind sie nie angekommen, und hierher gehören sie auch nicht mehr. (19)[10]

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[10] *rāh-i maġrib mẽ yah laṛke luṭ ga’e/vā̃ na pahũce aur ham se chuṭ ga’e.*

Niemand fragt, wie viel Gottesliebe ich im Herzen trage
Alle wollen nur wissen, wie hoch mein Gehalt ist. (23)[11]

Vergiss die Literatur, lass sein die Geschichte,
Moschee und Scheich lass hinter dir, geh’ in die Schule.
Was soll man sich in diesem kurzen Leben Sorgen machen –
iss Weißbrot, werd’ Beamter, spreize dich vor Stolz! (32)[12]

Der Lack der westlichen Kultur ist schon ein Ding für sich –
nicht nur einer wie ich, auch unser Scheich ist davon überzogen! (44)[13]

Mag es den Scheich zur Kaᶜba zieh’n, ich aber fahr’ nach England.
Soll er das Haus Gottes ansehen – ich besichtige derweil die Herrlichkeit Gottes! (46)[14]

Meine Vorfahren fürchteten sich, und ich fürchte mich auch,
aber sie fürchteten sich vor der Sünde, und ich mich vor dem Tode. (47) [15]

Über das Gefühl der Ohnmacht angesichts der türkischen Niederlage im italienisch-türkischen Krieg 1911/12:

Wir haben weder Waffenschein noch Muskelkraft,
um den Feinden der Türkei entgegenzutreten.
Aber wenigstens beten wir im tiefsten Innern,
die Würmer mögen Italiens Kanonen zerfressen. (36)[16]

Wie kein anderer Urdu-Dichter zuvor, spielt Akbar Ilāhābādī mit der Doppeldeutigkeit von Wörtern und insbesondere mit englischen Ausdrücken und deren Urdu-Homonymen bzw. setzt englische Ausdrücke in ironischer Absicht ein. Er machte diese Art Wortwitz zu einem Standardmittel der Urdu-Satire.

Muhammad Iqbāl (1877–1938), der als Vater der Pakistan-Idee und als Nationaldichter Pakistans gefeiert wird, drückte im Unterschied zu Akbar in seinen Hauptwerken ein neues Selbstwertgefühl der Muslime aus und rief sie zu selbstbewusstem Handeln auf. Eines seiner berühmtesten Gedichte ist die „Klage“ (*Śikvā*), in der er sich bei Gott über dessen Vernachlässigung der Muslime beschwert. Darauf folgt wenig später die Antwort Gottes, in der er die Muslime zu eigenem Handeln aufruft.

Da ein großer Teil seines Werkes in Persisch vorliegt, ist Iqbal sicher auch über Südasien hinaus bekannt. Neben dem konventionellen Bild des Moralpredigers und Heuchlers findet sich in seinem ersten Gedichtband ein ganzer Abschnitt mit Satiren auf moderne Entwicklungen, in denen er sich als sehr konservativ erweist. Er behandelt darin Themen wie politische Vereinigungen und erste Vorboten der repräsentativen Demokratie, Frauenbildung und freie Partnerwahl, die Untertänigkeit der Inder gegenüber den Briten, ihre mangelnde Wirtschaftskraft, soziale Probleme (Man baut ein Haus für die Unternehmer, aber keine Hütten für die Arbeiter!) und andere Zeitfragen.

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[11] *nahī̃ kuch is kī pursiś ulfat-i allāh kitnī hai/yahī sab pūchte haĩ āp kī tankhvāh kitnī hai.*
[12] *choṛ liṭrecar ko apnī hisṭarī ko bhūl jā/śaikh-o-masjid se taᶜalluq tark kar iskūl jā/cār din kī zindagī hai koft se kyā fā’ida/khā ḍabal roṭī, klarkī kar khuśī se phūl jā.*
[13] *tahẓīb-i maġribī kī bhī hai vārniś ᶜajīb/ham kyā janāb śaikh bhī cikne ghaṛe hu’e.*
[14] *sudhārẽ śaikh kaᶜbe ko ham inglistān dekhẽge/vah dekhẽ ghar khudā kā ham khudā kī śān dekhẽge.*
[15] *mire ajdād bhī ḍarte the Akbar maĩ bhī ḍartā hū̃/magar un ko gunāhõ se thā ḍar aur mujh ko marne se.*
[16] *na laisins hathyār kā hai, na zor/ki ṭurkī ke duśman se jā kar laṛẽ/tih-i dil se ham koste haĩ magar/ki iṭalī kī topõ mẽ kīṛe paṛẽ.*

Zum ersten Thema das folgende Beispiel, das man auch vor dem Hintergrund der seit dem 19. Jahrhundert weit verbreiteten religiösen Disputationen sehen muss:

> Der Mulla und das Paradies
>
> Ich war auch dabei und konnt’ nicht an mich halten,
> als Gott den Mulla schicken wollt’ ins Paradies.
>
> Ich sprach: „Ich bitte vielmals um Vergebung,
> an Wein, Weib und Gesang wird der keine Freude haben!
>
> Im Paradies gibt es kein Für und Wider,
> keine Dispute, keinen Streit.
>
> Sein Werk ist es, die Völker fehlzuleiten,
> doch im Paradies sind weder Kirche, Tempel noch Moschee. (568)[17]

Und zum Scheich in der modernen Welt:

> Uns ist die Welt entglitten,
> und ebenso das Paradies.
> Der Scheich kämpft um das Stiftungsrecht,
> doch hat er was, um es zu stiften? (406)[18]

Hier ist nicht die Gelegenheit, um sich eingehend mit Elementen des Komischen in Iqbals Schaffen zu befassen. Erwähnenswert ist jedoch, dass seine oft sehr pathetischen Gedichte mit Appellcharakter in der Folge häufig parodiert wurden. Fast alle pakistanischen Satiriker haben mindestens eines seiner Gedichte derartig umgeschrieben. Anlass ist in der Regel die weite Kluft zwischen Vision und Realität, besonders nach 1947 in Pakistan. Die Gedichte bieten sich aber auch gerade wegen ihrer pathetischen, erhabenen Diktion bestens dafür an. Diese Tatsache fand in der pakistanischen Literaturkritik bisher kaum Beachtung – vielleicht, weil man dafür Iqbal erst einmal von seinem Podest herunterholen und seine Sprache kritisch betrachten müsste.

Literarische Satiren in Pakistan

Pakistan wurde 1947 als neue Heimat für die Muslime des indischen Subkontinents gegründet. Von Beginn an entbrannte eine heftige Diskussion um die Orientierung und das Selbstverständnis des neuen Staates – als säkularer Staat mit überwiegend muslimischer Bevölkerung oder als islamischer Staat. Wenn sich Pakistan auch heute als islamische Republik definiert, so sind diese Debatten keineswegs beendet. Die Rolle des Islam im Staate, vor allem in der Gesetzgebung, im Bildungswesen und in den Medien, ist nach wie vor ein Hauptstreitpunkt zwischen den Vertretern verschiedener sozialer Kräfte, Machtblöcke und ideologischer Richtungen. Das wiederholte Versagen demokratischer Institutionen, das Weiterbestehen krasser sozialer Unterschiede und repressiver Feudalstrukturen, der Verlust Ostpakistans, das ungelöste Kaschmirproblem und die Einflussnahme der USA auf die Politik und Wirtschaft des Landes gehören zu den wichtigsten Themen, mit denen sich sozialkritische und darunter auch satirische Literatur auseinandersetzt. Dazu gehörte von Anfang an auch die Suche nach der kulturellen Identität, die Nasīm Hijāzī in einem Theaterstück behandelt hat.

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[17] *mullā aur bihiśt: maī̃ bhī h̲āz̲ir thā vahā̃ z̲abt̤-i sukhan na kar sakā/h̲aqq se jab h̲az̲rat-i mullā ko m̲ilā h̲ukm-i bihiśt//ᶜarz̲ kī mã̄i ne, ilāhī! mirī taqs̲īr muᶜāf/k̲h̲uś na ā’ẽge ise h̲ūr-o-śarāb-o-lab-i kiśt//nahī̃ firdaus muqām-i jadal-o-qāl-o-aqvāl/bah̲is-o-takrār is allāh ke bande kī sariśt//hai bad āmūzī-i aqvām-o-milal kām is kā/aur jannat mẽ na masjid, na kalīsā, na kuniśt!*

[18] *hāthõ se apne dāman-i dunyā nikal gayā/ruk̲h̲s̲at huā dilõ se k̲h̲iyāl-i maᶜād bhī/qānūn-i vaqf ke liye laṛte the śaik̲h̲ jī/pūcho to, vaqf ke lie hai jā’idād bhī!*

Nasīm H̱ijāzī (1914–1996):

Nasīm H̱ijāzī gehört zu den Bestsellerautoren in Pakistan und Indien. Sein Hauptgebiet sind die so genannten „islamischen“ bzw. „historischen“ Romane, eine Tradition der populären Unterhaltungsliteratur, die auf das späte 19. Jahrhundert zurückgeht. Neben einer großen Zahl von Romanen, die heroische Episoden aus der Geschichte der Muslime in verschiedenen Teilen ihres einstigen Herrschaftsgebietes (arabische Halbinsel, Iran, Andalusien, Südasien) behandeln oder vor dem Hintergrund blutiger Stammesfehden in den Nordwestregionen Pakistans zur Überwindung der Spaltung der Muslime aufrufen, hat er auch drei satirische Romane und ein satirisches Theaterstück verfasst, auf das ich hier kurz eingehen möchte.

Nasīm H̱ijāzī wird von linksliberalen Kritikern zu Recht als Propagandist eines militanten, einseitig auf heroische Vorbilder aus der Zeit der großen Muslimeroberungen abzielenden Islambildes verurteilt. Sein Theaterstück *S̤aqāfat kī talāś* (Auf der Suche nach der Kultur, 1956/59)[19] enthält jedoch sehr treffende Seitenhiebe gegen linke Intellektuelle der Oberschicht, deren völlige Unkenntnis der Lebensumstände und Wertvorstellungen einfacher Menschen auf dem flachen Lande mit allen Methoden der satirischen Überhöhung und des Grotesken bloßgestellt wird. Den Hintergrund bilden die Diskussionen um die Definition und den Charakter der „pakistanischen“ Kultur, die in den 1950er Jahren geführt wurden und ein wichtiger Bestandteil der Suche nach einer nationalen Identität (in Abgrenzung von Indien) waren. Im Unterschied zu einer rein auf das islamische Element orientierten Identitätsbestimmung betonten linke, z. T. marxistisch gebildete Intellektuelle die regionalen Traditionen und die eigenständigen Volkskulturen Pakistans, die sie durch eine gezielte Kulturpolitik fördern wollten. Diese Intellektuellen, die zeitweise wichtige Ämter in Ministerien und Medien inne hatten und zu denen einige bekannte Schriftsteller und Dichter gehörten, verkannten aber oft, welche Bedeutung religiöse Bindungen für die Menschen hatten, für die sie zu sprechen glaubten. Die Kluft zwischen einer säkular gesinnten, intellektuellen Elite und einfachen Dorfbewohnern ohne moderne Bildung bildet die Basis für Nasīm H̱ijāzīs Satire. Dieses sehr reale Dilemma progressiv gesinnter, mehr oder weniger wohlhabender Intellektueller der Mittel- und Oberschicht ist hier allerdings völlig ins Lächerliche gezogen und ohne jegliche Sympathie behandelt.

Die Handlung ist schnell erzählt: Städtische Intellektuelle, die im Stück als Kommunisten bezeichnet werden, planen eine Kampagne, um die traditionell negativ bewerteten Künste Tanz und Gesang von ihrem Stigma zu befreien und sie in den Dienst einer die regionale Vielfalt betonenden pakistanischen Kultur zu stellen. Durch ihre völlige Unkenntnis der Verhältnisse in den Dörfern, die sie besuchen, geraten sie in mehrere absurde, zum Teil riskante Situationen. Die professionellen Musiker und die Tänzerin, die der sozial niedrig stehenden Ḍom-Kaste angehören, haben keinen sehnlicheren Wunsch, als ihre angestammte Beschäftigung aufzugeben und „ehrbare“ Berufe zu ergreifen. Sie können überhaupt nicht nachvollziehen, warum gebildete junge Männer aus guten Familien sich in diese niederen Gefilde begeben. Die junge Tänzerin möchte heiraten und eine ganz konventionelle Ehe führen – als ehrbare Frau in die vier Wände ihres Hauses eingesperrt. Die Städter sind unfähig, diese Realität zu verstehen. Sie reden völlig über die Köpfe der „Volkskünstler“ hinweg. Ihre Vorstellung von der Volkskultur basiert auf der verkitschten Darstellung im kommerziellen Kino und in den Propagandafilmen der pakistanischen Kulturbehörde. Am Ende ergreifen sie die Flucht, haben aber zumindest begriffen, dass sie sich derartige Missionen in Zukunft ersparen werden.

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[19] Eine ausführlichere Analyse des Textes, illustriert durch zahlreiche Zitate, findet sich in meinem Aufsatz „Humor and Satire: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial“, in: *Annual of Urdu Studies* 26 (2011), 65–86. URL: http://www.urdustudies.com.

Nasīm H̱ijāzī arbeitet mit den Mitteln der groben Zuspitzung und der Slapstick-Komödie. Seine Kommunisten sind Nummern, die willenlos Befehle von oben ausführen. Sie bewegen sich unter den Dörflern mit einer Ungeschicktheit, die eine völlige Unkenntnis lokaler Sitten und Gebräuche und religiöser Wertvorstellungen verrät. So fangen sie z. B. an, ihre Trommeln zu schlagen und zu tanzen, als im Dorf gerade eine Beerdigung im Gange ist. Sie erfahren, dass der tugendhafte (*śarīf*) Dorfälteste in seinem Dorf jegliche Tanzvorstellungen und Volkstänze verboten hat. Hier wie auch in den Wunschvorstellungen der Tänzerin, aus der die Städter eine berühmte Volkskünstlerin machen möchten, zeigt sich das sehr konservative, orthodoxe Denken des Autors: Musik und Tanz werden als unanständig und unislamisch verurteilt, und das Ziel jeder Frau besteht darin, unter dem Schutz ihres Ehemannes hinter den Mauern ihres Hauses zu verschwinden. Dabei ist letzteres nicht unrealistisch: Die Segregation der Frau ist in diesem Milieu ein Zeichen sozialen Aufstiegs und einer „Islamisierung“ (im Sinne des Reformislams), die damit einhergeht. Man kann dem Autor also trotz aller satirischen Überspitzung die Berechtigung seiner Kritik nicht absprechen. Der Umgang der westlich gebildeten Eliten mit den sozialen Normen und den Glaubensvorstellungen der Mehrheit der Bevölkerung ist nach wie vor problematisch und bietet den Propagandisten eines politischen Islam zahlreiche Angriffspunkte. Indem er den Islam als einzig legitimes einigendes Band Pakistans und dominierendes Element der pakistanischen Kultur betont, reduziert H̱ijāzī jedoch das kulturelle und geistige Leben der Menschen, die er in seinem Werk als Vertreter des gesunden Volkempfindens auftreten lässt, um maßgebliche Komponenten. Er definiert ihre Identität einseitig durch den Islam, wobei er die komplexen lokalen, sozialen, ethnischen Identitäten, die eine Persönlichkeit ausmachen, bewusst ausgrenzt. Die Geschichte Pakistans hat gezeigt, dass die sprachliche und kulturelle Vielfalt des Landes zur Gefahr für dessen Einheit wird, wenn man sie negiert und unterdrückt. Der Abfall Bangladeshs von Pakistan und die blutigen Sprachenunruhen im Sindh haben dies deutlich unter Beweis gestellt. Gesang und Tanz sind feste Bestandteile des dörflichen Lebens und der Volksfrömmigkeit an den Sufi-Schreinen. Das Bild, das Nasīm H̲ijāzī zeichnet, entspricht einem von allen derartigen regionalen und kulturellen „Verunreinigungen“ bereinigten Verständnis des Islam.

Im Unterschied zu den Texten Z̲amīr Jaᶜfrīs, auf die ich gleich zu sprechen kommen werde, drückt sich bei Nasīm Hijāzī auch in sozialer Hinsicht eine weit konservativere Haltung aus. Er kritisiert die herrschenden Eliten wegen ihrer Verwestlichung und ihrer (vorgeblichen oder tatsächlichen) Abkehr vom Islam, idealisiert aber die halbfeudalen Lebensverhältnisse auf dem Lande, ohne deren repressive, ausbeuterische Kehrseite zu thematisieren. Die Stoßrichtung seiner Satiren ist sozial konservativ bis reaktionär, antisäkular, antiliberal und antiwestlich.

Sayyid Z̲amīr Jaᶜfrī (1916–1999):

Sayyid Z̲amīr Jaᶜfrī war einer der populärsten Humoristen und Satiriker Pakistans. Er hat eine große Zahl an Gedichtbänden, Zeitungskolumnen, Humoresken, Reiseberichten und Tagebuchaufzeichnungen hinterlassen. Seine satirischen Kolumnen und Vierzeiler waren fester Bestandteil mehrerer auflagenstarker Tageszeitungen Pakistans. Hauptantriebskraft seines satirischen Schreibens war die Kritik an den Verhältnissen im Lande und vor allem an der Führungsschicht, die er für das Scheitern der gesellschaftlichen Visionen aus der Gründungszeit Pakistans verantwortlich machte. Seine Hauptkritikpunkte kann man wie folgt zusammenfassen: Perpetuierung und z. T. Verschärfung der sozialen Gegensätze, ungebrochene Macht der Großgrundbesitzer, Korruptheit und Eigennutz der Bürokraten, Verletzung demokratischer Grundsätze, vor allem zu Zeiten der Militärdiktaturen, das Schüren von ethnischen und religiösen Konflikten und die Unterordnung der Interessen des Landes unter das Diktat der USA. Den politischen Eliten des Landes warf er eine völlige Entfremdung – sowohl kulturell als auch religiös – von der Masse der Bevölkerung vor. In einigen Gedichten gibt er den satirischen Ton zugunsten direkter Anklagen und Appelle auf. In den meisten Gedichten und Kolumnen finden sich fließende Übergänge zwischen Satire und unverhüllt vorgetragener Kritik. Im Folgenden sollen einige Beispiele aus seinem frühen (1952) und späten Schaffen (1990er Jahre) vorgestellt werden, die seinen Umgang mit religiösen Themen illustrieren.

Die Zitate sind der Gedichtsammlung *Musaddas-i badh̲ālī*, (wörtlich: „Sechszeiler über die üblen Zustände“) entnommen. Dies ist der Titel des ersten, längeren Gedichts, der eine satirische Abwandlung von *Musaddas-i H̲ālī*, der populären Bezeichnung der berühmten Dichtung *Madd-o-jazr-i islām* (Ebbe und Flut des Islam, 1879) von Alṭāf H̲usain H̲ālī (1837–1914) darstellt. Im Vorwort erwähnt der Autor, dass er ursprünglich eine Parodie der literarischen Vorlage geplant hatte, an diesem Vorhaben aber sehr schnell scheiterte und es auf eine Gesellschaftssatire reduzierte. Das ist angesichts der thematischen und gedanklichen Dimensionen der Vorlage nur zu verständlich, geht es doch bei H̲ālī um die Aufarbeitung der glorreichen Vergangenheit des Islam (sprich islamischer Reiche und der islamischen Herrschaft in Indien) und um die Mobilisierung der Muslime für eine ebenso glorreiche Zukunft. Dem kann Jaᶜfrī nur das Bild der alles andere als glorreichen Gegenwart entgegensetzen.

Im Titelgedicht beklagt der Autor die Abgehobenheit der Herrschenden und der Oberschicht, ihr Desinteresse an der eigenen Kultur, das völlige Fehlen eines Verantwortungsgefühls für das Land und die Gesellschaft in zahlreichen Bildern: Sie trinken Alkohol, tanzen in Klubs, kennen zwar Schiller und Shelley, aber keine Urdu-Dichter, interessieren sich nur für Geld und Macht und machen dafür mit den übelsten Verbrechern gemeinsame Sache und scheren sich einen Dreck um den Islam (14–20). Pakistan ist ein Boot, das den Sturm zwar sicher überstanden hat, aber am Ufer zerschellt ist (25)[20]. Er beklagt Engstirnigkeit, sektiererischen Eifer und Fanatismus und schließt diese Strophe mit den Worten: „Der Blick geht nicht mehr über die eigene Schwelle hinaus, steinerne Götzen sind wieder zu Gott geworden." (26)[21] Zum Umgang mit dem Islam in Pakistan meint der Dichter 1995:

> Der Islam ist ganz Güte, ganz Süße,
> allerdings haben wir Gift in den Honig gemischt. (39)[22]
>
> Aus einem Propheten und einer Gemeinde wurden lauter Sekten,
> aus einem Koran lauter einzelne Blätter. (40)[23]

Aber auch:

> Zugegeben, die Seele ist wichtig für das Leben,
> doch kann es Liebe geben, wo kein Körper ist? (54)[24]

Und in dem Gedicht „Freiheit" heißt es:

> Städte gibt es ohne Frage,
> welches Haus ist kinderlos?
> Und doch ist das Land verödet –
> Blumen, Werte, Gott, Prophet,
> nichts davon bleibt ihm im Sinn –
> der Hungernde kennt keine Freiheit. (86)[25]

Die Verteilung der Armensteuer

> Die Probleme sind verstanden,
> in Gold und Silber ausgedrückt.
> Das musste ich noch erleben: Im Namen von *zakāt*
> beginnt man, die Korruption zu verteilen. (102)[26]

Widerspruch

> Wir machen schon feine Unterschiede:
> Amerika mögen wir nicht, den Dollar wohl! (127)[27]

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[20] *salāmat jo̱ ṭūfān se ā ga'ī hai/ vaẖ kaśtī kināre se ṭakrā ga'ī hai.*

[21] *dar-o-āstā̃ muntahā ban ga'e haĩ/ vah patthar ke but phir k̲h̲udā ban ga'e haĩ.*

[22] *dīn-i islām hama mihr, hama śīrīnī/śahad mẽ ham ne magar zahr milā rakhā hai.*

[23] *ik payambar kī ik ummat hu'ī firqa firqa/ek qur'ān ko "varaqā varaqā" rakhā hai.*

[24] *mānā ki rūẖ kā bhī kariśma hai jān mẽ/kyā ᶜiśq agar b̲adan hī na ho darmiyān̲ mẽ.*

[25] *Azādī: śahar nagar m̲aujūd sahī/kis ke ghar a̲ulād nahī̃/mulk magar ābād nahī̃/phūl us̲ūl khudā-o-rasūl/ kuch bhī us ko yād nahī̃/bhūkā śak̲h̲s̲ āzād nahī̲̃.*

[26] *Zakāt kī taqsīm: masā'il kī tafhīm hone lagī hai/barā'e zar-o-sīm hone lagī hai/yah din dekhnā thā banām-i zakāt/karapśan kī taqsīm hone lagī ẖai.*

[27] *Taẓẓād: ham log to bhī baṛe dardmand haĩ/amrīka nāpasand hai ḍālar pasand hai.*

Der Laden der Taliban

> Als man die Taliban fragte,
> woher sie ihre Waffen hätten,
> sprachen sie: „Wir kämpfen im Namen Gottes,
> die Waffen haben wir aus Gottes Laden.“ (137)[28]

Und zuletzt ein ganz persönliches Gedicht:

> Abrechnung
>
> Über die anderen Rechtschaffenen,
> Nachtwachenden kann ich nichts sagen.
> Aber ich
> fürchte mich allein,
> darum bete ich. (139)[29]

Muśtāq Aẖmad Yūsufī (geb. 1923):

Im Unterschied zu den soeben erwähnten Autoren gehörten Yūsufīs Werke eher in den Bereich der gehobenen Literatur. Seine Texte sind literarisch anspruchsvoller und vor allem sprachlich wesentlich komplexer. Der Autor operiert häufig mit Wortspielen und Anspielungen auf literarische Werke der Gegenwart und Vergangenheit, deren Verständnis eine beträchtliche Belesenheit voraussetzt. Wortwitz und eine gewisse Überzeichnung der beschriebenen Personen sowie Selbstironie sind die Basis seines Humors. Direkte Gesellschaftskritik findet sich bei ihm nicht, vielmehr karikiert er die Verhältnisse nur im Einzelnen, an kleinen Alltagssituationen und beiläufigen Bemerkungen, indem er sie indirekt in Bezug zu den verkündeten Zielen und offiziellen Propagandasprüchen setzt oder Zitate der klassischen Literatur ironisch abgewandelt auf die Gegenwart bezieht. Dafür genügt es häufig, ein einzelnes Wort oder sogar nur einen einzelnen Buchstaben zu verändern.

Yūsufī stieg nach seinem Anfang als kleiner Bankangestellter schnell in hohe Managerposten in pakistanischen Banken auf. In seinem 1976 veröffentlichten Buch *Zarguzaśt* (Das Schicksal des Geldes, Wortspiel mit *sarguzaśt* – etwa: Lebensbericht, Abenteuer) behandelt er seine ersten Jahre in einer Bank in Karachi. Schon die Ausgangssituation ist ironisch: Er ist sich der Tatsache bewusst, dass das Bankwesen auf Zins und Zinseszins beruht und damit im Widersprach zur Scharia steht. Die ökonomische Notwendigkeit, den Lebensunterhalt zu verdienen, lässt ihm aber keine andere Wahl: Nur für diese Stelle bei der Bank kann er ein Empfehlungsschreiben vorweisen. Und selbstironisch bemerkt der Erzähler, dass er in diesem verhassten Beruf auch noch überaus erfolgreich war! (48–49)

Wie häufig in Autobiographien muslimischer Autoren, steht nicht so sehr der Erzähler selbst im Mittelpunkt, als vielmehr seine Kollegen und andere Zeitgenossen. Er überhöht ethnische und sprachliche Eigenheiten und persönliche Schrullen der auftretenden Figuren, stellt sie aber insgesamt in ihrer Verschrobenheit doch als liebenswerte Menschen dar. Yūsufī zeichnet ein amüsantes Bild des Anfangs des pakistanischen Bankwesens, noch unter britischer Führung und Anleitung. Trotz der Ärmlichkeit der geschilderten Lebensumstände ist dieses Bild nicht frei von Nostalgie angesichts der Unschuld und Arglosigkeit der Akteure, die sich von der später beklagten Heuchelei, Selbstsucht, Macht- und Geldgier der politischen und Wirtschaftselite wohltuend abhebt.

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[28] *Ṯ̣ālibān kī dukān*: *yah aslaẖa kahā̃ se milā hai batā’iye/jab yah savāl pūchā gayā ṭ̱ālibān se/bole k̲h̲udā kī rāh mẽ apnā jihād t̲h̲ā/yah aslaẖa milā hai k̲h̲udā kī dukān se.*

[29] *Muẖāṣaba*: *bāt nahī̃ yah dūsre nekūkārõ/śab bedārõ kī/lekin maĩ/tanhā’ī se ḍartā hū̃ /is liye ᶜibādat kartā hū̃.*

Welche Rolle spielen religiöse Vorstellungen in diesem Gesellschaftsbild? Für sich genommen, sind sie kein Thema. Sie tauchen in vielen kleinen Gedankensplittern, vor allem im Erzählerkommentar, auf. Hier seien einige wenige Kostproben vorgestellt:

In einer Aufzählung von Dingen, die vollste Aufmerksamkeit verlangen, nennt der Ich-Erzähler in einem Atemzug „Reichtum, Politik, Frauen und Gebet“ (49).

Ein Vorgesetzter ermahnt den Helden, fünfmal am Tag zu beten – das würde ihn davor bewahren, an eine Unterschlagung zu denken (60).

Derselbe Mann rät ihm, sich die Sonntagspredigten bekannter Theologen anzuhören, um seine Seele vom „Rost“ zu befreien – der Ich-Erzähler benutzt dafür aber lieber größere Mengen Bier! Als Entschuldigung führt er an, der Arzt habe ihm dies als eine Kur gegen Nierensteine empfohlen (61). In diesem Kontext bringt er auch einen Seitenhieb gegen den im Westen sehr bekannten Theologen Dr. Fazlur Rahman an, der Bier wegen seines geringen Alkoholgehalts für *halāl* erklärt hatte. Für diese und ähnliche Rechtsgutachten musste er mit einem zehnfachen Gehalt nach Amerika ins Exil gehen. Yūsufīs Fazit ist, der ehrenwerte Gelehrte hätte nur darauf hinweisen müssen, Bier sei zu 95% *ẖalāl* – entsprechend dem Wassergehalt (61).[30]

Als ihn ein Kollege ermahnt, auf den Pfad der Tugend zurückzukehren und allem Schlechten abzuschwören, sagt er sich: „Ich ärgerte mich sehr darüber. Hätte mir Gott die Kraft für schlechte Taten verliehen, könnte ich ihnen heute abschwören und religiöses Verdienst erwerben.“ (71)[31]

Ein weiser Mann klärt ihn darüber auf, womit man welche negativen Wirkungen neutralisieren könne: „Jugendlichen Übermut kuriert man mit einer Ehefrau, die Wirkung der Ehefrau wird durch die Kinder aufgehoben, und gegen Kinder hilft naturwissenschaftliche Bildung. Naturwissenschaftliche Bildung wird durch Religionslehre neutralisiert.“ (75)[32]

Ein Kollege wirft dem Schöpfer schlechte Arbeit vor, als etwas nicht richtig läuft. (112)[33]

Ein Pathane, der saftige Flüche liebt, scheut sich aber, besonders schmutzige Worte auszusprechen. Stattdessen schreibt er sie in *Kufi*-Schrift auf – eine Kalligraphie von Unflätigkeiten! Dies ist eine Pervertierung der Koran-Suren, die in *Kufi*–Schrift viele Moscheen zieren. (119)

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[30] *isī nauᶜ ke do tīn fatāvī-i pur futūr kī pādāś mẽ unhẽ jalā vaṭan ho kar das gunī tank̲h̲vāh par amrīka jānā paṛā. agar ḍākṭar s̱āẖib qibla ẓarā bhī samajh aur sā'ins se kām lete to fatvā mẽ ᶜāqilõ ko bas itnā iśāra kāfī thā ki bī'ar 95 fī s̱ad ẖalāl hai.*

[31] *hamẽ is kā baṛā qalaq thā ki k̲h̲udā ne hamẽ badī kī istiṭāᶜat dī hotī to āj ham bhī us se tauba kar ke s̤avāb lūṭte.*

[32] *javānī dīvānī kā daf bīvī se mārā jātā hai. bīvī kā daf aulād se mārte hai. aur aulād kā sā'insī taᶜlīm se. sā'insī taᶜlīm kā daf apne hā̃ dīniyāt se mārā jātā hai.*

[33] *apnī tamām saᶜī-o-kāviś ke bāvujūd kabhī nākāmyābī K̲h̲ān s̱āẖib ke qadam cūmne lage, yā baiṭhe biṭhā'e nuqs̱ān-o-āzār pahũc jā'e to kamar par donõ hāth rakhe, āsmān kī ṭaraf mũh kar ke, dunyā banāne vāle ke miᶜyār-i kārkardagī par apnī be iṭminānī kā iẓhār farmāte.*

An einer Stelle vergleicht er seinen Glauben mit einem alten Ventilator: „Der Eisenring, an dem er seit 20 Jahren wie mein Glaube zitternd von der Decke hing, war zu drei Vierteln abgeschliffen.“ (160)[34]

Ein Kollege, der nach einem sehr lustigen Junggesellenleben mit 57 Jahren impotent wird, wendet sich daraufhin von den Frauen ab und einem Sufi-*Pīr* zu. Der Kommentar des Erzählers lautet: „*gar vas̱l nahī̃ to ẖaẕrat hī sahī*“ (Wenn schon keine Liebesnacht, dann wenigstens ein Sufi-Meister!) in Abwandlung des Ghalib-Verses „*gar nahī̃ vas̱l to ẖasrat hī sahī*“ (Wenn schon keine Liebesnacht, dann wenigstens die Sehnsucht!, 161). Durch die Veränderung eines einzigen Buchstabens wird hier eine sehr amüsante Wirkung erreicht.

In der nächsten Passage erreicht er eine komische Wirkung durch die Doppelbedeutung des Worts *pīrī*: als Alter oder als Status bzw. Wirken eines *pīr*:

„Was *pīrī murīdī* (*murīdī* Jüngerschaft, Schülerschaft) betrifft, so halte ich nichts von *murīdī* , aber von *pīrī* bin ich überzeugt. Wer von uns wird nicht alt?“ (161)[35]

Weiter berichtet er: „Zusammen mit jedem Menschen wird ein Teufel geboren. Aẖmadullāh ‚Śaśdar’ hatte aus seinem Teufel einen Muslim gemacht. Er rasierte ihm den Schnurrbart ab und zog ihm eine Hose an, die nur bis zu den Knöcheln reichte.“ (161)[36]

An anderer Stelle wird eine Bemerkung Ẕamīr Jaᶜfrīs zitiert: „Wenn sich bei uns die Leute ein Bild von Gott machen wollen, schauen sie den Reviervorsteher an.“ (163)[37]

Als ein sehr übergewichtiger Kollege beim Herabsteigen von seinem Hochbett auf den Koffer eines Zimmergenossen tritt, bricht dieser in sich zusammen (wtl.: wird platt wie ein *capātī*, d.h. Brotfladen). Dabei geht eine zwischen den Kleidungsstücken im Koffer aufbewahrte Whiskyflasche zu Bruch. Der Besitzer des Koffers beklagt sich: „Herr Schah hat mein Freitagsjackett entweiht.“ (164)[38]

Adams Vertreibung aus dem Paradies wird vom Erzähler – in Anlehnung an Iqbal – wie folgt gewertet: „Adams Sünde bestand darin, aus einer Wüstenei, nämlich der Erde, einen blühenden Garten zu machen. Wer weiß, wie viele öde Planeten, Monde und Sonnen noch ewig auf der Suche nach einem Adam ihre Bahnen ziehen müssen.“ (192)[39]

Diese kleinen Auszüge mögen genügen, um einen Eindruck von den Grundeinstellungen des Autors/Erzählers zu gewinnen. Religion ist Bestandteil des Lebens, aber nicht Hauptsinn und –zweck des Daseins. Religiöse Vorschriften wie Gebetszeiten und Fasten werden eher lax gehandhabt, aber die religiösen Gefühle anderer toleriert und respektiert. Der ironische Grundton, der über allem liegt, tut diesem Gefühl des Respekts keinen Abbruch. Das Grundprinzip des Umgangs miteinander ist leben und leben lassen.

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[34] *chaṭ ke jis āhanī kaṛe mẽ vah bīs sāl se hamāre īmān kī ṭaraẖ mutaẕalzal thā, yah ¾ ghis cukā thā.*

[35] *jahā̃ tak pīrī murīdī kā taᶜalluq hai, ham murīdī ke bilkul qā’il nahī̃. pīrī ke haĩ. buṛhāpā kise nahī̃ ātā.*

[36] *har insān ke ṣāth ek śaiṭān paidā hotā hai. Aẖmadullāh ‚Śaśdar’ ne apne śaiṭān ko musalmān kar ke us kī labẽ katar dī̃ aur ṭak̲h̲nõ se ū̃cā pājāma pahnā diyā.*
„eine Hose, die nur bis zu den Knöcheln reicht“: *śarᶜī pājāmā*. Dies stützt sich vor allem auf Hadith-Überliefe-rungen, in denen es als hoffärtig verurteilt wird, die Kleidung am Boden hinter sich herzuschleifen, aber auch auf Koranstellen (17:37, 31:18), die Prahlerei und Großmannssucht geißeln.

[37] *ẖamāre hā̃ ke log k̲h̲udā ke tas̱avvur ke liye thānedār ko dekhte haĩ.*

[38] *Śāh Jī ne merī jumᶜe kī ackan nāpāk kar dī.*

[39] *yah Ādam hī kā gunāh thā ki ek sunsān biyābān k̲h̲arābe – kurra-i ᶜarẕ – ko gulzār banā gayā. varna na jāne kitne siyyāre, kitne mah-o-mihr hõge ki andhī k̲h̲alā’õ mẽ qarn hā qarn se, az azal tā ba abd, apne Ādam kī talāś mẽ yū̃hī gardiś karte rahẽge.*

Nicht vergessen werden darf, dass viele Autoren sich zu einem ganz persönlichen Zugang zu Gott bekennen, mit dem sie vertraute Zwiesprache halten. Dieses intime Verhältnis drückt sich u. a. in der Anrede „*Allāh Miyā̃*“ (etwa: lieber Gott) aus, die im Urdu außerhalb theologischer Texte und offizieller Anlässe gern gebraucht wird.

Entwicklungen der letzten Jahrzehnte

Muslimische Urdu-Autoren aller Epochen haben sich der verschiedensten Spielarten des Komischen bedient, um sich mit ihrem Leben, ihrer Gesellschaft und ihren Zeitgenossen auseinanderzusetzen. Bis in die zweite Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts verspürten sie dabei nicht die Notwendigkeit, ihr Muslimsein zu betonen oder unter Beweis zu stellen. Erst die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Ansturm der westlichen Kultur und Bildung unter britischer Herrschaft und die Polarisierung der großen religiösen Gemeinschaften im Rahmen der neuen politischen Bedingungen führten dazu, dass die muslimische Identität bzw. deren Verlust zu einem wichtigen Thema auch in der satirischen Literatur wurde. Mit der Gründung Pakistans erlangte diese Problematik neue Dimensionen. Zum einen wurden die demokratischen und sozialen Defizite des neuen Staates beklagt, aber zunehmend auch die Unterwerfung unter das Diktat der USA. In den Jahren seit dem zweiten amerikanischen Krieg im Irak sehen sich liberale Intellektuelle in Pakistan einem verstärkten Druck ausgesetzt. Sie sehen die ihnen wichtigen Werte von Demokratie, Säkularismus und Humanismus verletzt und können sie kaum noch gegen islamistische Kritiker verteidigen. Gleichzeitig fühlen sie sich durch die Kulturkampfrhetorik westlicher Ideologen in ihrer Identität als Muslime herausgefordert. So kann man beobachten, dass einstmals radikal säkular eingestellte Autoren plötzlich ihr Bekenntnis zum Islam betonen. Es gibt in Pakistan keine Zensur der Literatur, die solche Lippenbekenntnisse von ihnen einfordern würde. Sicher ist der Druck islamistischer Kräfte in bestimmten Medien und Institutionen groß, aber er allein kann diesen Sinneswandel nicht erklären. Dennoch findet man auch in der Literatur der letzten Jahre ironische oder sogar ans Blasphemische grenzende Äußerungen. Der populäre Schriftsteller Mustansar Husain Tārar lässt zum Beispiel eine Romanfigur in *Rākh* (Asche, 1987) eine Vorstellung von Tanzmädchen mit den Worten „Bismillāh“ beginnen und nutzt jede Gelegenheit, um ironische oder sarkastische Sichtweisen auf religiöse Vorschriften und das religiöse Personal anzubringen. So fragt der Held des Romans nach dem Mord an einem Hindu seinen Vater, warum Bundu Ram, der niemandem etwas getan hat, in die Hölle kommen soll und der Polizeioffizier, der die Plünderungen angeordnet hatte, ins Paradies. Als er den Maulawi fragt, ob auch alle Chinesen in die Hölle kommen und ob dort überhaupt genug Platz sei, bekommt er vier Schläge mit dem Rohrstock – doch sein Vater ist stolz auf ihn (109).[40] Der Held sammelt als Jugendlicher Autogramme, wobei er in der Liste der berühmten Personen eine Miss Universe und Maulānā Maudūdī (d.h. einen der Hauptbegründer des politischen Islam auf dem Subkontinent) in einem Atemzug nennt (128). Der gesamte Roman ist durchzogen von ähnlichen Anspielungen, die nicht unwesentlich zu seinem Reiz beitragen. Derselbe Autor hat jedoch 2002 unter dem Titel *Qilᶜa Jangī* auch einen Tatsachenroman verfasst, in dem er die Menschenrechtsverletzungen der US-Armee in Afghanistan aufs Schärfste anklagt – nicht von einer islamistischen, sondern von einer humanistischen Position aus.

Nicht mit Humor, sonder verbittert und verzweifelt klagt die Dichterin Śabnam Śakīl Gott an:

> Beim Anblick verkohlter Leichen von Kindern im besetzten Kaschmir
>
> Was auch immer in der Welt geschieht,
> man hat den Eindruck, dass Gott
> am Lauf der Dinge nichts verändern möchte,
> weil er wie alle großen Grundbesitzer
> sich mit dem Status quo
> abgefunden hat. (33)[41]

All dies lässt vermuten, dass der Umgang mit dem Religiösen viel stärker durch konkrete Lebensumstände, historische Situationen, den Bildungshintergrund und die kulturelle Prägung bestimmt ist als durch einen abstrakten Islam. Nicht zuletzt entscheidet auch das erwartete Publikum darüber, wie viel Freiheit sich ein Autor bei der Behandlung religiöser Themen erlauben kann. Der souveräne, lockere Umgang mit allem Heiligen und Religiösen vor dem 19. Jahrhundert und zum Teil darüber hinaus spricht dafür, dass erst das Gefühl, die eigenen Identität verteidigen und rechtfertigen zu müssen, die Leichtigkeit in diesen Fragen beeinträchtigt hat. Die gegenwärtige Weltlage ist nicht dazu angetan, die Haltung zur Religion zu entspannen – sie bewirkt das Gegenteil.

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[40] *„aur abbā jī hamāre maulavī s̱āẖib ḵahte haĩ ki sab ke sab kāfir jahannum mẽ jal jā'ẽge to maĩ ne pūchā ki yah jo pata nahī̃ ḵitne arab cīnī haĩ to yah bhī sāre ke sāre jahannum mẽ jā'ẽge to maulavī s̱āẖib ne kahā, bilkul – to maĩ ne kahā maulavī s̱āẖib itne sāre cīniyõ ne kyā qus̱ūr ḵiyā hai – yah kaise ho saktā hai ki vah sab jahannum mẽ ḍāl diye jā'ẽ – jahannum mẽ to itnī jagah nahī̃ hogī. is par abbā jī pata hai maulavī s̱āẖib ne mujhe kyā kahā? unhõ ne cār bed māre aur kahne lage tū k̲h̲abīṣ hai. abba jī yah k̲h̲abīṣ kyā hotā hai?" Caudharī Allāhdād ne beṭe ke gāl thapke aur k̲h̲uś ho kar kahā „oh terā bhalā ho jā'e".*

[41] *maqbūẕa Kaśmīr mẽ kaśmīrī baccõ kī jhulsī hu'ī lāśõ kī tas̱vīr dekh kar: ko'ī bhī sāniẖa dunyā mẽ guzre/ k̲h̲udā jaise niẕām-i zindagī ko/badalne mẽ yaqīn rakhtā nahī̃/ki vah bhī sab baṛe jāgīrdārõ kī ṭaraẖ se/ sṭaiṭas ko/kā ẖāmī ho gayā hai.*

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“Who am I?” : On the narrativity of identity and violence in Sheila Rohekar’s novel *Tāvīz*

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Abstract

“Communal violence” and “communalism” have long been central tropes of progressivist Hindi prose writing. *Tāvīz* (The Amulet), a contemporary Hindi novel by Sheila Rohekar, is a recent and outstanding example within this literary tradition. The plot revolves around a mixed Hindu-Muslim love marriage and the complications this socially disrespected alliance leads to, culminating in the consecutive murder of both husband and wife, and their son. The focal point of the novel is the reconstruction of the identity crisis of the son, who – having a Hindu mother and a Muslim father – becomes a militant Hindutva activist and is killed during an agitation for the construction of the Rama-birth temple in Ayodhya. Throughout the novel, the recovered diary of the boy’s great-grandfather plays an important role as a historical narrative linking up the present with the past. The diary is used to provide constant flashbacks to generations earlier, when identities were still more “fuzzy” and open to inter-communal relationships compared with the present. The present is perceived as a catastrophic decline. Nevertheless, even then the writer of the diary expresses his frustration about independent India’s inability to put an end to the evils in society, and particularly to communalism. Sheila Rohekar is probably the sole living Indian-Jewish author in the world of contemporary Hindi writing.

Keywords: Hindi literature, Indian Jewish literature, communalism, secularism, contemporary Indian religion, violence and literature

Short stories and novels on the complexities of Hindu-Muslim relationships in general, and of communal tensions in particular, are legion in modern Hindi literature; the subject is common in colonial and post-colonial Hindi writing as well, including authors such as Bhāratendu Hariścandra (*Bhārat durdaśā*), Premcand (*Paṃc parameśvar* and many others), Amṛtlāl Nāgar (*Taslīm Lakhnavī* and other stories), Yaśpāl (*Pardā*, *Gamī kī khuśī*, *Prem kā sār* etc.), Viṣṇu Prabhākar, Kamaleśvar (*Kitne pākistān*), and many others. Partition stories are also usually labelled as *sāmpradāyiktā kā sandarbh* in Indian histories of Hindi literature – and for instance, to mention two recent examples, in Aśok Bhāṭiyā’s *Samkālīn hindī-kahānī kā itihās* (p. 203ff) and in Bī. Ār. Panerū’s *Bhārat-vibhājan aur hiṃdī kathā-sāhitya* (Almoṛā 2006), for whom the creation of Pakistan was caused simply by “the influence of the poisonous fruits of communalism” (*sāṃpradāyiktā ke viṣaile phaloṃ kā prabhāv*, p. 201). Probably the most popular example from Hindi literature is Bhīṣam Sāhnī’s novel *Tamas* from 1974 and Govind Nihalani’s 1987 film version of it, broadcast on Indian television 40 years after independence. Religious feelings are very often fictionalized in the light of what is conveniently called communalism, and stereotypically juxtaposed with what is conveniently called “secularism”. Therefore, the creation of Pakistan is still primarily perceived as an epiphany of communal sentiments, which means a construction of collective religious identities that disregard modern nationalism.

In the 1980s, the subject of communal violence against the Sikh community after the murder of Indira Gandhi is also occasionally treated in Hindi fiction, for instance in Punnī Siṃh's short story *Śok*. Usually, however, communal violence has been perceived in terms of Hindu-Muslim riots exclusively.

The 1990s have seen another wave of fictional renderings of the Hindu-Muslim relationship and contemporary communal clashes initiated by the terrible destruction of the Babri Masjid and the following wave of violence throughout India. I would particularly like to mention Sudhā Aroṛā's long short story *Kālā śukravār* and Geetanjali Shree's novel *Hamārā śahar us baras* ("Our town that year", 1998) as examples of literary responses to contemporary communal riots and their psychological impact on individual personalities and social relationships. Stories on the general subject of inter-communal relationships without any concrete reference to contemporary politics continue to be written, as for example Namitā Siṃh's *Rājā kā cauk,* or Uday Prakāś's *Aur aṃt meṃ prārthnā*, which explores the subtle psychological mindset of Dr. Wākaṃkar, a devoted RSS volunteer.[1] Over the last decades authors with Muslim backgrounds like Asghar Vajāhat, Abdul Bismillāh, Śānī and several others have contributed Muslim perspectives on these issues in Hindi, as has been examined in Ulrike Starck's excellent study on novels written by Muslim authors in Hindi. Needless to say, communal riots, communalism, and inter-communal relationships in general rank high on the list of subjects of Muslim authors, and I would like to mention Muśarraf Ālam Zauqī's *Laiboreṭarī* (2003) as a more recent example, a novel based on the 2002 Gujarat riots.

These are just some preliminary thoughts that I do not wish to keep to myself, when I present my reading of an outstanding novel from the genre of contemporary fiction on communalism. This presentation derives from my fascination with Sheila Rohekar's[2] novel *Tāvīz* ("The amulet"), a wonderful, literarily refined and psychologically insightful piece of Hindi novel writing, perhaps a bit less known simply because its author lives outside of the hotspot of career making in Hindi literature, i.e. outside of Delhi – she is in Lucknow. And besides that, I will also try to interpret her novel as an example of Jewish writing in Hindi.

The plot of Sheila Rohekar's novel *Tāvīz* is based on a love marriage between a Hindu woman (Revā) and a Muslim man (Anvar) and the social, psychological, and political consequences of this conscious transgression of religious boundaries. Inter-communal marriage is not new as a theme in Hindi literature, and I would like to mention Krishna Sobti's *Ār se bichuī* in particular in this context.

Tāvīz is a novel on communal identity and violence, and was published in 2005 at Vāṇī Prakāśan's, with a second edition in 2008. It begins with the last announcement in a Lucknow newspaper seeking anyone who could identify the dead body of a middle-aged lady. At the end of the novel, which ties both ends of the narrated time together in a circle, the readers will know that it was Revā’s body. In the first chapter, Nainā talks to her husband Nīraj jokingly as he reads aloud the newspaper announcement while she serves tea. His remark is that “if this poor thing is not even identified, who might cry about her?”[3] Nainā responds that the police will definitely be crying because they have to arrange the final rites and leave the case open in their files (p. 9). They remain unaware that both of them had known the dead lady, who appears to have committed suicide by throwing herself under a train. Later on, the truth is revealed by the all-knowing narrator to the reader: An innocent woman was brutally killed. On the next page, Nainā and Nīraj talk about Revā’s son, who disappeared some years ago – the reader will find out that he too was killed, and that the murder of both his parents was related to his own murder. All of them simply disappear – without leaving names and memories, even among close relatives and friends.

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[1] The *Rāṭrīya Svayaṃ Sevak Saṃgh* (RSS), founded 1925, is a kind of right wing Hindu cadre organization.

[2] In proper transliteration from Devnāgarī: Śīlā Rohekar. I use the English version of personal names, as far as I am aware of a common standardized version.

The frame narration concerns the fate of Revā, her husband Anvar, and their son Anant (often called “Annu”). All three end up being brutally killed on different occasions. After the flash-forward in the first chapter, the narration reverts to a conventionally narrated time, beginning sometime in the 1960s. Revā is forced to break with her family when she decides to marry not only a boy of her own choice, but a Muslim medical doctor, Anvar. Her father reluctantly supports her decision and does not make her go without his blessing, but he accepts the fact that the break with his daughter has to be complete and cannot be questioned. The couple decides on a civil marriage (p. 90) which, again, neither of the families can accept. Revā has a modern middle class background, while Anvar’s family fits into the stereotype of Muslim families in India; it is – according to general norms – more “backward”, Anvar being the first university educated person in the family. Nevertheless, Anvar’s family finds a way to cope with what they perceive as one of the whims of their son, while Revā’s marriage serves to break her off from her family altogether. The couple moves to the boy’s family, where she is accepted as the new daughter-in-law. The family members, however, initially take it for granted that she would convert to Islam, which she refuses (p. 88). After the shock wears off, however, they manage to cope even with this decision after some argument. Anvar, her husband, is liberal in outlook, and supports her personal choices, and even accepts that their son, though circumcised, is not brought up as a Muslim. This part of the story takes place in Ahmedabad in Gujarat.

The narration switches back and forth in narrative time, changing between auctorial narration, reportage, and forms of non-linear story-telling, including flashbacks, suspension and particularly a series of references back to the 19th and earlier 20th century events and observations reported in the diary of Revā’s grandfather, which bind Revā together with her family’s past. This diary forms something like a narration within the narration, contrasting the present, with its exclusivist identity politics, with the colonial and early post-colonial golden past, with its less rigid opportunities to transcend religious boundaries. Revā’s paternal grandfather, a freedom fighter, not only narrates his own experiences in the diary, but also reports stories that he has heard from earlier generations. Compared to Revā, her grandfather is much more outspoken. After 1947, he becomes more and more critical of the new state and its society. For Revā, the national enthusiasm and moral rigour of the liberation struggle is already part of a remote past; her visits to the Sabarmati Ashram close to Ahmedabad on her free Sundays have already become part of a middle-class weekend routine, a ritualized form of reassurance, living off from the memorization of a kind of folklore version of the liberation movement, unrelated to the present and its civilizational decline. Mahatma Gandhi is somehow present as a kind of moral ideal (p. 127), but is contested and lacks any impact on one's own life or social and intellectual reality. During a later Sunday visit to Sabarmati Ashram together with her son Annu, some five or six years after Anvar's murder, Maheś Jhā, her future second husband, joins them and proposes marriage.

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[3] *Is becārī kī śinākhat bhī nahīṃ ho pā rahī ho, us par bhalā kaun ronevālā hogā?* (p. 9).

At crucial points in the book, critical reflections on the situation before and after independence are mixed in, and particularly in the grandfather's diary, which Revā keeps exploring, and which constitutes the memorial link between not only the political past and present, but also between herself and her own relatives (a broken relationship because of her love marriage). Her grandfather writes in 1959: "What has been achieved by independence? The social setup is the same, the trench between poor and rich is the same."[4]

While Revā's love relationship and marriage with Anvar is a symbolic act of transcending the borders of religious communities, the brutal murder of her husband, her son, and herself reveal the structure of a society which is threatened, when walls between communities are disrespected and borders transgresseded. Annu and his identity crisis as a young lad is a living symbol of the failure of identity constructions that go beyond traditional social boundaries in modern India.

In addition to this basic plot, the novel allows several readings. As a narration of several generations of Revā's family, it is a family novel. It is also a coming-of-age novel regarding Anvar and Revā's son, explaining his identity problems and how personal radicalization in terms of Hindutva is a substitute for a strong inborn identity. The novel can also be read as an attempt to explore the psycho-social basis of religious violence. After all, it also concerns the plight of a secular-minded woman transcending social borders, the loneliness and moral strength of Annu's mother. A certain identification of the author with her main female character is clearly evident. She is the embodiment of the innocent passive victim of society.

The starting point of the linear narrated time is the post-colonial Indian present, when Revā decides to marry Anvar. Both parental families disapprove of this marriage, but the Muslim family manages to cope with it, even though they are not as "modern" as Revā's family. The son Annu is not religiously educated, even though the Kadi is called (p. 110), which means, he is circumcised according to traditional Muslim custom, but he is, as Rohekar puts it, Hindu as well as Muslim (p. 118). Annu is educated in a space supposedly free of religion, which can be positively defined as freedom from any pressure to choose or to follow any religion. This cherished space is however highly contested. Even though he is circumcised, his name is “Anant”, a Hindu-name (“the Endless; one who does not have an end”). From the perspective of his second paternal grandmother (after his mother’s second marriage), this means, his ritual status is – strictly speaking – untouchable, because his physical father was Muslim. Anant is, in other words, a projection of an individual identity beyond traditional identity markers.

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[4] *Svataṃtratā se kyā hāsil huā? Sāmājik hāṃcā vahī hai, vahī amīr-garīb kī khāī hai* (p. 279).

The novel narrates the failure to maintain this space. During the communal riot in Ahmedabad in 1969, Anvar is lured away from home by Hindu rioters disguised as hospital staff, who are asking the doctor to follow them to the hospital because of an emergency. They also suggest to him to bring his son with him, but Anant decides to stay with his mother. This spontaneous decision saves his life. This story is referred to a couple of times in the novel (and particularly on pages 117 and 271). Later on, Anvar’s tortured body is recovered.

When Revā agrees to a second marriage to the Hindu widower Maheś Jhā, the boy is twelve. Once she has moved to his home, which happens to be in Lucknow, it emerges that he favours his two own physical sons over Annu. The most discriminatory person, however, is Maheś’s pious widowed mother. This discrimination is particularly apparent in some symbolic prohibitions, particularly when she does not let him come close to her Pūjā utensils and uses every chance to make him understand that he is a half-blood and therefore illegitimate (p. 216 etc.). After some time, this behaviour leaves its mark on her son and on the newly married couple itself. Anant himself has never really accepted Maheś, who plays the role of the strict father. The boy adapts himself, maintaining a spirit of opposition towards his stepfather, and falls behind in school, while his estrangement from his stepfather keeps growing. After some time, the situation becomes unbearable. On one occasion, Maheś turns violent against Revā, but in a move that comes as a complete surprise for Maheś, she returns his beating. Following this event, she decides to leave her second husband.

By this time Annu has already left home. He is studying in college, but his main concern is his sense of belonging, which he receives neither from his mother, nor his murdered father. His standard question is the ever recurring: *Maiṃ kaun hūṃ?* “Who am I?” (p. 217, 219, 224 etc.), which reveals itself as the ever recurring formula of a broken identity with its inherent desire for self-assurance. Annu experiences his hybrid origin not as a positive gift, but as a burden. When his friends turn towards Hindutva nationalism, he decides to follow suit: He himself begins to participate in political meetings and denies his Muslim descent. Thus he turns into a *kār sevak* (p. 239), an activist for the construction of the notorious *Rām janmabhūmi*-temple in the town of Ayodhya. In a sense he simply compensates for his lack of identity with religious radicalism.

He breaks with his stepfather and his mother, but shortly after, during the 1990 agitation in front of the Babri Masjid, Annu is killed by a police bullet. Then follows the central event of the fictional plot: While his body is being prepared for cremation, his friends find out about Annu’s circumcision – ... *iskī to kaṭī huī hai! ... musallā hai sālā! Bhencod yahāṃ kyā kar rahā thā?* (p. 245) – “His is cut away! … this damn Mussulman! What has this sisterfucker lost here?”

The first reaction to the naked truth is that this aberration must be some kind of *cālākī*, some trick: the dead Annu is immediately suspected of being Muslim (p.

244). This leads to a cascade of ensuing questions and hasty conclusions. Since circumcision is the unquestioned male Muslim identity marker, Hindu activists immediately start swearing and maltreating the dead body. The political leaders – all Brahmins – discuss the issue more seriously. They are worried that this issue might easily lead to complications. Annu is suspected of having been a Pakistani agent provocateur. Most of his former comrades join in in the malign production of allegations. It is in any case taken for granted that a Muslim has maliciously infiltrated the Hindu campaign, and thereby polluted and desacralized the *śobhāyātrā* ("campaign of splendour"), i.e. the campaign for the destruction of the Babri Masjid (p. 247). Other options are also discussed with the Superintendent of Police, who appears to be a close associate of the campaign, and also a Brahmin. In any case, it is taken for granted that Annu must have been part of a larger conspiracy. The cremation is first denied – and only when Annu's close friends Vikās and Bhabhu take care of his body is it finally cremated. The "leader" (*netā*), however, argues, his ashes should be thrown in the dust bin instead of the river (p. 248).

Thereafter, it is decided to keep it strictly confidential that a Muslim may have been martyred for the sacred cause of the *Rām Janmabhūmi:* the claim that the true historical Babri Masjid was built on the site of the birthplace of Vishnu's Avatara Rama, and the demand that it be removed and replaced with a temple. In order to avoid involving the campaign in a discussion about possible Muslim infiltration, it is decided that Annu's mother must be "silenced". She lives alone in Ahmedabad, and her precise whereabouts are investigated. It is found out that Annu had not maintained contact with relatives in recent years, not even his mother. The decision to have Annu's mother killed is taken because the influential politicians behind the communal riot are scared that Annu's family might demand his body for burial. At the end of the novel, Revā is abducted and thrown on the train tracks on order of the campaign organizers to make it look like a suicide. This happens immediately after a friend of Annu, driven by his bad conscience, had all of a sudden appeared at her house and urged her to flee immediately, warning her that a murderous gang was on the way to her.

In this dramatic scene, in order to be recognized by Annu's mother as a true harbinger of news concerning her, he hands over an amulet (*tāvīz*) to Revā, one which Annu used to wear and had worn until his end. He had received it once from his mother, and it has been worn by Annu's grandfather, the writer of the diary. This amulet is later found by Revā's sister lying on the ground after the disappearance (and brutal murder) of Revā, when she comes looking for her sister only to find her flat empty. On opening the amulet, she discovers a piece of paper with a healing mantra and a note dropped by a master from Ayodhya, which reveals an old friendship between Revā's and Anvar's family in the generation of their grandfather's, symbolizing peaceful inter-communal relationships. It emerges that her own family and Anvar's family had been friends with each other in previous generations, and that there once had been a pilgrimage to Ayodhya in a bygone age, when inter-communal relations were more common than today – an epoch, when amulets were readily given to members of other faiths as tokens of friendship.

The memories of the past, conveyed by the diary of the grandfather, go back to what he had heard from his own grandfather, back to the story of a certain *Pāgal Bābā* ("mad monk") from 1855 – a religious discussion about the question of which God is highest: *Śiv, Rām, Devī, Nirākār*, concerning *dharmayuddh* ("holy war", p. 14) – an open discussion without any idea of rioting or infighting. In the 1920s, the maternal uncle explains to the eleven-year-old Campak, Revā's father (as the grandfather's diary explains): "Our country has never been fundamentalist. When the Mugals or Parsees, Christians and Jews came from outside, once they had been living here on the earth and water of this country, they were addressed as being from here."[5] Revā explains dharma to her son Annu, when reflecting on his discrimination by Maheś's mother: "Why is it that Hindus and Muslims are different..." (p. 217).

The present tragic relationship between Hindus and Muslims, culminating in the *Rām Janmabhūmi* campaign, is contrasted with a colonial past, when many options were open for all kinds of relationships among religions and religious communities. The brutal murder of Anvar, his son, and his wife, society's revenge for the mixed marriage and its refusal to accept inter-communal relationships deeply affects the present. Grandfather's diary, which appears over and over again in the novel as Revā keeps reading it, is a lasting link to her family after the break caused by her love marriage with Anvar. In 1959 he complains about communal riots: "My God, why have you granted me such a long life? For this? To see this barbarism?"[6] Revā, in her loneliness after having been deprived of her own and her in-laws' family, after the murder of her husband, an unhappy second marriage, and being abandoned by her son begins to continue the diary.

A central element in Revā's biography is the repeated visits to the Sabarmati Ashram and the Mahatma Gandhi memorial culture that is related to this place close to Ahmedabad. For Annu, this is just a visit to a museum, and completely unrelated to his own life, in which the question *Maiṃ kaun hūṃ?* ("Who am I?") gains more and more importance. During a joint Sunday tour to the Sabarmati Ashram, Maheś proposes marriage, and after some hesitation, Revā agrees.

Finally, the motif which transforms Annu into a Hindu activist is "power" (*sattā*, p. 274). This "power" helps him recover from the feeling of being powerless compared to his stepfather, who treats him badly. At the same time, Annu's radicalization is a way to overcome the impossibility of having a relationship with the four years younger Nainā (p. 274), who is reluctant because of Annu's half-breed background. Annu's identity as a child of a mixed marriage cannot but create a severe identity crisis in the young man. Becoming an activist is an overcompensation of his psychological situation and finally leads to the complete denial of his Muslim father. He reinvents his own biography with a Hindu father (p. 242), who in reality is his stepfather.

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[5] *Hamārā deś kabhī bhī kaṭṭarpaṃthī nahīṃ rahā. Bāhar se āe mugal yā pārsī, īsāī yā yahūdī jab is deś kī miṭṭī-pānī ke hoke rahe to ve yahīṃ ke kahlāe* (p. 51).

[6] *Īśvar! Mujhe itnā laṃbā jīvan kyoṃ diyā? Is barbartā ke lie?* (p. 278).

Jewish identity and fictional writing

I would like to refer to a questionnaire to contemporary authors in the September 2009 edition of the famous literary journal *Haṃs*, in which question number 7 was “Why aren’t there many more contributions from Christians and authors with other religious identities in Hindi, leaving out authors with a Muslim identity?” (*Haṃs* 9/2009, p. 36ff). I cannot go into detail here. On the whole, however, I think the different responses illustrate how difficult it is for post-colonial Indian enlightened intellectual discourse in general to perceive religion as a positive resource of resilience and cultural resistance and of self-reflexivity, which means, in other forms than as a resource for politically reactionary thinking and social conservatism. Arcnā Varmā starts her response with the laconic sentence: “And finally once again this damn identity.”

In his 2002 book *Hindī upanyās kā itihās* (“A history of the Hindi novel”) Gopāl Rāy concludes the previously mentioned chapter on *sampradāyiktā kā saṃdarbh* as follows: “In this context, the fact that has to be mentioned, is that Hindi novelists are motivated by liberal, humanist, and democratic values as opposed to communalist thought and emotion.”[7]

The background of such a position is an implicit assumption that there is a secularist position as such. A central question of my reading of this genre in Hindi literature has been: Is there something like a common progressivist position shared by all, independent of his or her inherited identity in terms of social, religious, or gender conditioning? Is there a uniform literary perspective on communal violence among the authors beyond their social, cultural, and religious aspects? Is it all just about, to quote Aśok Bhāṭiyā again, *sāmpradāyiktā, dharmāndhtā kā tīvra virodh* – the severe resistance against communalism and superstition (p. 212) – is it all simply about the implementation of the terminology and concepts of enlightenment and its grand narrative?

To what extent are the perception and the fictional rendering dependent on the author’s personal identity – including religious, social, regional, and gender identities? And given this dependence, to what extent is the reflexivity of an individual author related to his or her ability to completely transcend his or her background in the name of what in South Asia is usually labelled secularism? Or, in other words, is a multiplicity of “secularist” – in the South Asian sense of the word – perspectives in fictional literature possible and likely, something like an identity-sensitive “secularism”?

My own discovery of Sheila Rohekar (born 1942) came through my research on Indian Jewish literature. In a private e-mail, Vishnu Khare made me aware of Rohekar’s Bene Israel Jewish background. The Bene Israel lived mostly in the Konkan region south of Goa until the 19th century, but after having been discovered by the worldwide Jewish community, which revived and strengthened their Jewish identity, they began to move to towns in the present states of Maharashtra and Gujarat. After independence, the great majority of them emigrated to Israel.

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[7] *Is sambandh meṃ ullekhnīy tathya yah hai ki hindī ke upanyāskār sāmpradāyik soc aur bhāvnā kī dṛṣṭi se udār, mānvīy aur prajātāntrik mūlyoṃ se paricālit haiṃ* (Rāy 2002: 438).

In her autobiographical book “The book of Esther”, Esther David writes the following prayer regarding her imagined emigration from India to Israel: “It would wipe out my past. Give me a new life. Help me forget India. … I was running away from India.” (p. 371). After many years in Israel and France and after her subsequent return to her native town Ahmedabad in Gujarat, she writes: “If I wished to live like a Jew, I could live anywhere. I did not have to live in Israel to feel more Jewish than I felt in India. … Israel unnerved me.” (p. 377). Sheila Rohekar has moved from Ahmedabad to Lucknow – like her character Revā, however, unlike her fictional character, she does not return. She has changed from Gujarati to Hindi as the language of her literary activity. The leading question that struck me when I read the novel was whether her sensitivity to the complex psyche of Annu and the meaning of his gradual radicalization as an assurance of identity has something to do with her own minority status?

Rohekar has been living in Delhi and Lucknow for decades and is presently probably singular as a Jewish Hindi author. She has been teaching natural sciences on college level and is married to the Hindi author Ravīndra Varmā. Her early stories were written in Gujarati, and her first collection, with the title *Laiflain nī bahār,* is in Gujarati, and was written in the 1970s. After moving to North India, she began to write in Hindi. Her short stories were published in established Hindi magazines like *Sārikā* and *Dharmyug*, and later *Hans, Kathā Deś* and *Kathā Kram*. In 1978 her first short novel in Hindi, *Dinānt,* was published (unfortunately unavailable for me until now) followed by *Tāvīz* in 2005. The manuscript of another novel with the preliminary title *Apne hone kī jagah* is more or less finished and will hopefully be published soon. This forthcoming novel focuses on questions of Indian Jewish identity before and after the post-colonial emigration that lead the Jewish community in India to the verge of extinction, narrated from the perspective of Jewish inhabitants of a *vṛddhāśram* – a home for elderly people – and is a swan song for the dwindling Jewish community in India.

The other famous Jewish Hindi author is Mira Mahadevan (Mīrā Mahādevan), who is particularly known for one novel, *Apnā ghar*, originally published in Hindi in 1961 and in a free English translation under the title “Shulamith” in 1975. It describes the Bene Israel lifestyle and identity conflicts in early post-colonial India, when the emigration of the majority of Bene Israel to Israel had happened only recently or was still ongoing. Mahādevan has also written about a dozen short stories on various issues, demonstrating a strong Gandhian influence on her perception of social and communal conflicts in modern India. Mira Mahadevan, born Miriam Jacob Mendrekar, and married to a South Indian Hindu, has lived in an atmosphere inspired by Gandhian thought, partly in the famous Sabarmati Ashram in Maharashtra, where Hindi has been promoted as the spoken language of daily communication, which made her feel at home in Hindi.

There are a few Indian Jewish authors of fine literature in English. Esther David (born 1945) is perhaps the most famous among those still living in a quickly diminishing community, a returnee from emigration to Israel and later France. “The House of Esther”, published 2003, is a kind of literary autobiography. Among the poets, Nissim Ezekiel (1924–2004) is the most prominent. Ezekiel wrote some of the most interesting pieces of Indo-English poetry, sometimes directly related to his Jewish background, for example as in the title of his collection "Latter-day psalms".

Like Esther David, Sheila Rohekar only started in later years to write about Jewish issues. Her forthcoming novel concerns the remaining bits and pieces of the changing Jewish identity, from the rediscovery of the Bene Israel through the Jewish ecumene to modernization and overseas migration. In particular it treats the threat to their separate identity caused by emigration and middle-class mainstreaming processes, and the difficulty of maintaining Jewish identity in India. At the same time it is critical of Israeli politics and more or less of Zionism in general.

Of course, Rohekar subscribes to the national formula of unity in diversity, but as a fiction writer she transcends stereotypical anti-communalist formulas in her narration. Religion does not only consist of the legendary *dharm ke ṭhekedār* ("dealers in religion") in the tradition of progressivist writing. For Revā, clearly the alter ego of the author, the basic opposition is between *dharm* and *adharm* in the emphatic Gandhian sense, as she explains to her young son, when he asks his mother why Hindus and Muslims are different (p. 217). Real religion is about *imāndārī* (p. 133), which is to say, it's about honesty and personal integrity, and not about "bowing down" (*jhuknā*, p. 133) or the struggle for power, as her son Annu perceives it. However, the person who embodies this existential understanding of religion, Revā, is killed and her body remains unidentified: Nobody cries for her, nor for Annu, whose ashes the "leader" suggests be thrown into the dustbin. Society loses their "memory and name", so important in the Jewish tradition (Hebrew: *Yād va śem*). Only the novel keeps a record.

The reference to *dharm* and *adharm* as transcending the stereotypical Hindu-Muslim opposition allows Revā to evaluate religion as such as a positive value. Revā and Anvar's mixed marriage symbolizes this dharma that goes beyond traditional forms of religion. But this religion appears to have a past, but no present and no future. The first one and a half pages of the novel describe the morning routine and the joking relationship of Nainā (Revā's sister) and her husband – then, all of a sudden her husband finds the news in the newspaper about a dead human body needing to be identified – but they are not aware that this is Revā's mortal remains. The strange parallel between the petit bourgeois context of the morning talk and the news about a brutal murder, which hardly disturbs the family routine, marks the extreme contrast between the hardly hidden violence in society and the inherent ignorance of the social middle-class life, totally ignorant of the substratum of brutality in society.

The most powerful symbol of the transcendence of religious boundaries is Annu's amulet (*tāvīz*), which serves as the title of this novel. This small token of inter-communal well wishing, having gone lost during the abduction and murder of Revā in the last chapter of the book, lies on the floor to be trampled upon. It is a telling symbol of the failure to transcend borders, and at the same time a symbol of what *dharm,* in the most emphatic sense, beyond communalism, is meant to be about. In the present, however, inter-communal harmony is nothing more than a faint memory of a bygone dream of *dharm* – from Revā's and Sheila Rohekar's perspective, religion and ethics transcending the traditional borders of belief systems.

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Strangeness and historicity against nativism: blurring the frontiers of the nation in Arun Kolatkar's poetry

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Abstract

Kolatkar's poetry corresponds to Rancière's definition of the literary as realm of "dissensus", undoing strict delineating frontiers. Kolatkar refuses to draw the line between what is included and excluded – both in the space of the Bombay he portrays (and specifically the Kala Ghoda neighborhood) or in the space of writing itself, since the space of writing is linked to the space of the nation and frontiers of perception correspond to geopolitical frontiers. His poetry does not excise strangeness but makes it visible. It thrives on the "refusal of the world", on people and objects abandoned at the margins of the nation and of our ordinary perception. It also celebrates those who oppose the certainties of identity and the sacredness of the nation (A. Appadurai). It hence subverts the ideology of Hindu nationalism that has been trying to restore an Indian-Hindu essence by purging history, language, and identity from so-called foreign, minor, or inauthentic elements. Kolatkar constantly exposes the historicity of identity and of language against nativism, the hospitality of poetics against the politics of expurgation.

Keywords: Indian poetry, Arun Kolatkar, bhakti, hospitality, defamiliarization, nativism, nation

Against the majoritarian, petrified, and exclusive perceptions of identity and "rootedness," contemporary Indian poets seem to put forward alternative ways of belonging and trace a lineage back to the off-center, the itinerant, the unsettled and the unsettling.

Arun Kolatkar (1932–2004), who was a Bombay Brahmin and a bilingual poet in Marathi but also in English, hence so-called part of the "majority" culture, repeatedly dismissed the "insider" vs "outsider", minority vs majority, authentic vs "alien" debates, his poetry perpetually hovering over boundary lines. "You use the tradition to the extent you find it relevant to the world around you. Hindu tradition is so amorphous. It's got room in it […] for every other tradition"[1]. To Dominique Sila-Khan, the landscape of South Asia and the fate of its inhabitants may have been different if history had not forced so many people to "cross the threshold"[2]. It might hence be possible to imagine a form of belonging (whether national, linguistic or cultural) *as* threshold, and this is precisely the locus of Arun Kolatkar's poetry. Categories like "foreign", "authentic", or even "Indian" become meaningless. His poetry subverts the quest of origins, challenges stable national narratives as well as the equation made between Indianness / Hinduness and majority.

The space of writing is connected to the space of the nation itself, while frontiers of perception also correspond to geopolitical frontiers. Kolatkar's poetry blurs the frontiers of the nation-state, refuses to draw a line between what is included and excluded, and constantly exposes the historicity of identity or language *against* nativism.

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[1] See Arun Kolatkar's interview in Eunice de Souza, 1999, p. 22.
[2] Dominique Sila-Khan, 2004.

The ideology of Hindu nationalism rests on the recovery of an Indian-Hindu essence that has been sullied by successive foreign invasions, on the homogenization of the space of the nation, language and history of India, the purgation of so-called "exogenous", minor, or "inauthentic" elements, by targeting all those who are not "the sons of the soil" (predominantly Muslims, but also Indian Christians, British and in Bombay particularly, migrants of all sorts), as if there was such a thing as an innate "indianness" entrenched in the *natural* frontiers of Bharat.

This nativist "Hinduness" is associated with the dominant culture and the religious majority, while all those who are not part of the majority, seem to be outside of the Indian nation. They are targeted as being "anti-national" and "anti-democratic" at the same time and, as the works of Aamir Mufti and Arjun Appadurai show, are the target of hatred and community-based violence.[3] The writer and critic Amit Chaudhuri writes: "'Hinduism' and the 'mainstream'; how frequently are these words juxtaposed, and made synonymous with each other! […] Ironically, saffron is the colour of our mainstream […]. At what point, and how, did the colour of renunciation, marginality and withdrawal from the world, become the symbol of a militant, and materialistic, majoritarianism? […] For years now, the BJP's satellites have imposed a violent, if illegal, ban on imagined offences to the Hindu religion, and abused and harassed artists and writers for their supposed transgressions."[4] By contrast to this "mainstream" majoritarianism celebrated by the custodians of purity, to the "certainties of identity and the sacredness of the nation" (Arjun Appadurai). Kolatkar traces a lineage back to the minor, the transgressive, the foreign and the de-territorialized. He continuously manipulates lines of perception and subverts petrified representations.

The aim of this poetry is thus to open up our vision, to transgress the frontiers of perception, of propriety, of "order". It celebrates the formidably creative anarchy of borderless territories where "all laws break down" ("Man of the Year", in the *Kala Ghoda Poems* collection). The world is seen from another perspective, from the margins, from the sides, from under or closer, etc, street-level, just like the pariah-dog that opens *Kala Ghoda Poems* in the poem "Pi-dog":

> This is the time of day I like best,
> and this the hour
> when I can call this city my own […]
>
> What I like about this time and place
> – as I lie here hugging the ground,
> my jaw at rest on crossed forepaws,
>
> my eyes level with the welltempered
> but gaptoothed keyboard
> of the black-and-white concrete blocks

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[3] See Arjun Appadurai, 2006 and Aamir Mufti, 2007.

[4] Amit Chaudhuri, 2008, pp. 162–163.

that form the border of this trisland
and give me my primary horizon –
is that I am left completely undisturbed

to work in peace on my magnum opus:
a triple sonata for a circumpiano
based on three distinct themes –

one suggested by a magpie robin,
another by the wail of an ambulance,
and the third by a rockdrill

His poetry thrives on what is stigmatized as alien or filthy, on what is perpetually distanced or estranged from us because its otherness is threatening or because it does not fit in. Leftovers, wastes, scraps, junk(ies), dropouts, all those who are left out, abandoned on the roadside, on the margins of modernization and of our ordinary perception or exclusive and hygienist vision are the substance of his poetry, looked *at* and not looked *through.* The collection *Kala Ghoda Poems* for example, that takes its name from a neighborhood of South Bombay, records the urban everyday and the successive appearances of the different characters and pavement-dwellers of the Kala Ghoda traffic island. It is peopled by paralytics, lepers, alcoholics, tramps, errant children, stray dogs, castaway objects, beggars, old bicycle tires or plastic jerry-cans, etc. Kolatkar's poetry privileges the minute, the peripheral, the improper and intractable dimensions of the world. Everything becomes meaningful, nothing superfluous.

His poetry is hence characterized by a kind of meticulous x-ray vision that privileges the details over the whole. The complexity and heterogeneity of reality in its infinite singularities is never concealed under a kind of compact or monumental vision and knowledge. His poems often focus on the eclectic assemblage of reality. Behind an everyday object, often reduced to its plain utilitarian surface, or neutralized by habitual perceptions, the poet discovers and reveals another reality, much more composite and ambiguous. Inter-revelation between things or people that are usually dissociated, in different realms and contexts, substitutes itself to exclusion just like piles of rubbish and their poetic inventories connect the debris and the diversity of the world:

a fresh new series of installations
goes on display [...]

in the form of modest piles of rubbish
all along the kerb

at regular intervals of about
fifteen paces perhaps,
and consisting of dry leaves, scraps of paper,

prawn shells, onion skins, potato peels,
castoff condoms, dead flowers
– mostly gulmohur and copper-cod. ("Meera")

If rubbish, which keeps on invading Kolatkar's poetry, is such a potent metaphor, it is because rubbish also stands for the underdogs of society and the refuse of the world. The poem “Song of Rubbish,” for instance, celebrates a reality which has been confined to silence or invisibility, exiled “in the wilderness of a landfill site”. In the poem “Meera,” the sweeper-lady, a contemporary embodiment of the devotional *bhakti*[5] poet Meerabai, collects rubbish, but this discarded reality is spiritualized. The sacred litany supposed to recite the theological qualities of God, becomes, through a parodic reversal, the material litany of things, wastes, and provisional works of art, for there is a constant sacralisation of impermanence in Kolatkar’s poetry.

As they sink deeper
into themselves,
eggshells and dead flowers,

dry leaves and melon rinds,
breadcrumbs and condoms,
chicken bones and potato peels

start giving off their essence,
exude the wine
of worthlessness, express

an attar of thankfulness
that floods
the cracks on her heels,

licks the soles
and arches of her feet,
anoints

callouses,
and rises
between her toes.

And if “Meera” takes sidesweeps “at *errant* scraps of paper, / chas[ing] the *riffraff* of dry leaves off the road” (italics mine), it is also because rubbish represents the poor and homeless who crowd the pavements of the megalopolis. In a city of fifteen million citizens, half of which live in slums … and an estimated ten percent of the rest are pavement dwellers. Homes, when they exist, writes Arjun Appadurai, are often unstable and shoddy products.[6] Space being so scarce, chasing the poor off the road and evicting slum-dwellers, is not only highly lucrative,[7] but has also become a question of national prestige. A lot of urban planning in major Indian cities implies confining or expelling the *visibly* poor (beggars, vagrants, etc), *cleansing* space, especially in "global" cities and showcases of India. There is no home, no place to stay for all these outsiders, outside of their own bodies (Appadurai), but also outside of Kolatkar's writing. Unlike the restricted space of Bombay, a space that continues evicting and compartmentalizing, the space of writing does not excise strangeness but opens to it and makes it *visible*.

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[5] North India *Bhakti* is a powerful movement of popular devotion (roughly from the 13th to the 18th centuries). It has been reinterpreted as subaltern and subversive, since it also represented a compelling movement of resistance against Brahmin orthodoxy. *Bhakti* poets were often itinerant and included women and members of low castes, untouchables and dissident Brahmins. They produced extraordinary poetry, expressing themselves in the regional dialects, rather than in Sanskrit, in an oral, popular, sometimes rough language.

[6] See Arjun Appadurai, 2002.

[7] Real estate prices in Bombay have reached record heights. The Dharavi slum, for example, often referred to as the biggest slum in Asia with approximately one million people, stands on two square kilometers of land estimated to be worth more than ten billion dollars.

The castaways of modernity are also the *literal* outcastes, the Dalits, still subjected to multiple marginalities and who exemplify the powerlessness that accompanies a system based on exclusion. The hierarchical caste system, which is associated to the two key concepts of pollution and purity,[8] implies the partition and segregation of space. Dalits were indeed relegated outside or at the fringes of villages.[9] This spatial exclusion corresponds both to a symbolic expulsion of humanity, since outcastes were denied the status of full human beings, and to a discursive exclusion. They were excluded from all forms of knowledge and representation, excluded from a language also – Sanskrit –, their exploitation sanctified by religious and legal texts. Ambedkar once said to Gandhi in a famous dictum, "Gandhiji I have no homeland". Dalits are – according to this perception – strangers or refugees in their own land, the real outsiders, as it were, of the Indian nation.[10]

Yet Kolatkar places these outcasts at the center of his poetry, at the heart of India and Kala Ghoda. No wonder it is a mongrel, a pariah-dog (the Indian-English word "pi-dog" would come from the Hindi *pāhī*, "outsider") who opens the collection and is said to lie "exactly at the center of this traffic island," also exactly where the symbol of colonial power (the equestrian statue of Edward VII, from which the name of Kala Ghoda, "black horse" takes its name) used to stand. This collection hence represents nothing else than a genesis. A *new* world is born, from the debris of the world. The pi-dog's inaugural soliloquy at daybreak is like a hymn celebrating the beauty of creation. Elements of the world are named for the first time and appear: "this is the time I like best, / and this the hour / when I can *call* this city my own" (italics mine). And the pi-dog's words, waiting for the sun to rise, command the world: "as i play, / the city slowly reconstructs itself".

Kolatkar's poetry thus centers on minority and marginality, but also on outsiders and foreignness, transforming the politics of eviction and exclusion into a poetics of hospitality. Nation-states often trace the frontier between who is undesirable and who welcome. This frontier is both geographic and symbolic, but sometimes also visibly materialized (in India for example, on the frontier with Bangladesh) to "protect" the integrity of the Indian nation from illegal immigrants, Muslims and terrorists, all lumped together in the same conveniently broad category.

For the stranger or the alien, as Hannah Arendt (and Appadurai drawing on Arendt) has remarkably shown, is the frightening symbol of difference and individuality as such, that we tend to expurgate because he reminds us of our inability to transform him.[11] He deconstructs the fiction of purity on which identities often stand. For the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, the fear of the foreigner or outsider is the fear of the "proliferating multiplicity," the multiplicity that reproduces itself outside of the law (and which explains the fear of illegal immigrants, immigrants in excess) who must be excluded from consensus, excluded for consensus to be – just like details threaten the idea of an organic whole.[12] Yet, as Jacques Rancière also demonstrates, literature precisely undoes these lines of partition, these hierarchies and strict delineating frontiers, reallocating voices and places, giving names, inventing singularities and subjects, making visible and audible what was previously invisible or inaudible.

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[8] Brahmanism expresses the ideal of purity by the ever-present threat of the organic world and by a systematic attitude of repulsion towards every kind of leftovers which are thought to be the main channel for impurity. See Dumont, 1966 and Lannoy, 2006.

[9] Sharankumar Limbale, the dalit critic, includes in the dalit community "all those living outside the boundary of the village", 2004, p. 30.

[10] See Arjun Dangle's anthology, *Homeless in my Land,* 1992.

The Kala Ghoda traffic island and the *Kala Ghoda Poems* collection thus not only give space and time to the castaways of modernity (the metaphor of shipwrecked refugees on a deserted –traffic – island runs through the collection) but also represent another vision of the Indian nation itself. Kolatkar constantly connects the physical with the metaphysical, the minutely local with the panoptical, the micro and macro levels, and the everyday with the geopolitical. The vagrant mixed-breed pi-dog, with its seven black patches like "seven disjointed islands" is the real *mongrel* equivalent of cosmopolitan Bombay, and the "triangular traffic island" is constantly equated with the triangle-shaped Indian subcontinent, or rather, with what it should be. The old *idli* woman, for example, in the long "Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda" sequence, sits on the "lesser island" which is compared to Sri Lanka and is appended "to the much larger one, which is almost / subcontinental in proportion". The India celebrated in Kolatkar's poetry is the India vivified, put in motion, and reclaimed by its "strangers" and outsiders.

The Kala Ghoda traffic island is an open and unrestricted space, thriving on rubbish and "pollution," not walled in exclusive frontiers, nor appropriated by one community. One of the traffic island characters hence exclaims in "Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda": "boy, am I glad they've left / at least this one traffic island alone; / haven't landscaped it to death, / put a fence around it, / and slapped logos all over it." And the expression "landscape to death" suddenly makes *literal* sense, once we remember the Bombay riots and anti-Muslim pogroms in 1992–1993, in which hundreds were butchered.

Arjun Appadurai indeed makes the link between the battle for space and the intensification of communal strife: "the explosive violence of 1992–1993 translated the problem of scarce space into the imaginary of cleansed space, a space without Muslim bodies."[13] It meant cleansing space not just of the visibly poor, but also cleaning Indian identity of its non-native elements.[14] For many extremists of the Shiv Sena and the MNS in Bombay, the national space of India, and Bombay particularly, is reserved for the "sons of the soil" (an ironic statement for the most composite of Indian cities, peopled by migrants, Portuguese, British, Jews, Parsis, Iraqis,

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[11] See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

[12] See Jacques Rancière, 2004.

[13] Arjun Appadurai, 2002, p. 72.

[14] "The issue of cleaning up Bombay was not limited to the slums. The clearing of footpaths, the removal of beggars, and deportation of the alleged 40 000 illegal Bangladeshis living in the city had also been high on the Shiv Sena / BJP agenda for a long time", in Thomas Blom Hansen, 2001, p. 210.

Russians, Persians, and Indians from the whole subcontinent), excluding not just Muslims but all "outsiders", from South Indian non-Marathi immigrants to Biharis, etc.

Appadurai also explains that all moral and social taxonomies find abhorrent the items, like minorities or foreigners, which blur boundaries. Dirt is matter out of place. Kolatkar, on the contrary, grounds his work on those that make lines wobble, on people, objects and realities that are on the move and cannot be framed, or that smash categories and habitual perceptions, on the so-called "polluters" of space, mainstream identity or pure lineages: mixed-breeds and migrants (brought by the turmoil of history), alcoholics and tramps, loafers and pilgrims, homeless and nomads. The pavement-dwellers in *Kala Ghoda Poems*, for example, are not *settled* but keep on circulating in-between, blurring the frontiers between intimacy and exposure, private and public spaces; living, eating, loving, dressing and sleeping in the open. Kolatkar celebrates those who are strangers to the land, strangers to others, strangers, sometimes, to themselves – migrants of all sorts who counter the certainties of identity and nationalism.

Like Kolatkar, these strangers do not frame reality into pre-fabricated perceptions or conditionings of a nativist conscience, and they refuse to consider themselves as the proprietors of meaning, the possessors of the world they inhabit.

No wonder Kolatkar placed himself in the blues and in the *bhakti* traditions. In the section "Words for music" of *The Boatride*, written in the late 60s, this inspiration is palpable. Kolatkar was fascinated by Blues singers like Bessie Smith, Muddy waters ("their names are like poems"[15]) and by blues lyrics. The "Words for music" poems, that were originally meant to be songs, are anchored in the idiom of the street. They are indeed poems of drunkenness and "booze", solitude and rejection, memory and survival, melancholy and humor, of people who wander through the night and through the city, people who have given themselves up to alcohol and to music: "I was wondering if you'd let me stay the night / I haven't eaten all day I could do with a bite … I'm completely broke I've nowhere else to go / I can't sleep on the road the cops have told me so" ("Door to Door Blues"). Yet, as always, Kolatkar makes multiple traditions and inspirations jumble in his poetry.[16] We thus find the same "poetics of non-belonging", the same casual familiarity, conversational tone and slangy idiom in a lot of *bhakti* compositions (originally meant to be songs) and in Kolatkar's translations of Marathi *bhakti* poets like Tukaram and Janabai, Namdeo and Eknath (see the "Translations" section of *The Boatride*). These *bhakti* voices translated by the poet belong to the Maharashtra *Varkari* (literally pilgrim) tradition. They were not only rebels (see footnote 5) who transgressed frontiers, but also wanderers. The *bhakti* poet is "forsaken by the last human being, / He's usually found in deserted places" ("Who cares for God's man?"). "An immigrant now, I'm / a citizen of No Land" says Tuka ("There's no percentage").

A poem called "The Turnaround" (*The Boatride*) may help us to understand

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[15] See Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's introduction to *The Boatride*.

[16] Kolatkar asks for "[the] right to claim everything that comes from our roots and everything that comes from 'elsewhere' and put the two together in one defiant all-inclusive category", "No easy answers", *The Hindu*, "Literary Review", Sunday, September 05, 2004.

Kolatkar's affinity with improper, deviant and marginal characters. They no longer have any kind of exclusive belonging, and have *lost* everything. This picaresque poem that resembles the mock-heroic journeys of some of the blues-*bhakti* personas in other poems, begins with the line "Bombay made me a beggar" and narrates the gradual dispossession of an urban wanderer. But this dispossession, an equivalent to the ordeal of *tīrtha*, is the key to revelation. At the very end of the journey, the world is restored to consciousness and *seen* anew: "sweat stung my eyes / and I could see." The turnaround here also stands for a *conversion* of perception. When hierarchies and frontiers are transgressed, the "I" thrown off center and homes become provisional, then it is also a condition of renewal and inclusion:

> sweat stung my eyes
> and I could see.
>
> A low fence by the roadside.
> A clean swept yard.
> A hut. An old man.
> A young woman in a doorway.
> I asked for some water
> and cupped my hands to receive it.
>
> Water dripping down my elbows
> I looked at the old man.
> The goodly beard.
> The contentment that showed in his eyes.
> The cut up can of kerosene
> that lay prostrate before him. ("The turnaround")

If Tukaram, who also calls himself "enduring bum" and "wretched beggar," is transformed into "an immigrant", a citizen of no-land, it is also because "every home is [his] bank / and granary". That calls to mind a famous (made famous by Edward Saïd) quotation by the 12th century monk Hugo de Saint Victor: "he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign land."[17] Seeing the entire world as a foreign land, which makes possible originality of vision, conversely means seeing the entire world as hospitable and thus dissolving the radical frontiers between "foreign" and "native", "strange" and "familiar", Self and Other, proper and improper.

The space of Kolatkar's writing does not excise strangeness but opens to it and makes it visible also through language. The poetic celebration of creative dislocations and estrangements is of course linked to the issue of English in India, a *displaced* language that has distanced itself from its original model, has been set in motion, pluralized, Indianized. Neither can identity be cleansed of its so-called exogenous elements nor can language be "purified," made to conform to an "authentic" origin. There is no such thing as an innate condition, tradition or language that would have been corrupted, from which a nation would be "estranged" or that would estrange a nation. The *Kala Ghoda* collection thus time and again celebrates *Bombay* and never Mumbai, as the city was renamed by Hindu nationalists in 1995 to undo the supposed British and Portuguese perversions of a so-called authentic "Indianness". And the whole collection revolves around names of places or people that have been recently "nationalized" or "indigenized". Kolatkar's English poetry is thus vivified with words from other Indian languages, and his poems are often constructed around litany-like enumerations of names which give evidence to all kinds of origins and religions, bear testimony to the multiple linguistic and cultural heritages of the Indian subcontinent.

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[17] Edward Said, 2000, p. 186.

History makes the nation, but also language and identity move, subverts rigid, univocal frontiers and territories, exclusive appropriations of a lineage, a language, a narrative or a geographical space. Kolatkar's mobile poetry (both in the sense that it constantly makes lines and frontiers move and wobble but also because you hear the voice speak in his poems, with its emotional labile surface, its silences, modalizations and interruptions) celebrates digressions, displacements, uprooting, and arbitrary encounters, identities and territories which are altered by migrants and strangers – those who are precisely brought in by the turmoil of history.

Some of his poems are thus supposed to be "found songs" based on newspaper reports, on overheard conversations, on scraps from the world. Kolatkar does not write in a unique, proper or sanitized language, any more than he chases "foreign," "improper," or "remaining" elements from history, language from identity. He *uses* them all, for everything is born again and revitalized in his poetry.

Strangeness is itself forged in Kolatkar's process of writing and translating, since there is no such thing as a source text in his poetry. It is thus often impossible to distinguish the "original" versions in Marathi or in English from their translations. Certain poems are supposed to be translated in Marathi from English or vice versa but never had an identifiable Marathi version; others are supposed to have been written in one language, lost and rewritten in the other language. Other poems are presented as translations but are complete recreations that have not much to do with the original. There is no "authenticity" to go back to and no "repatriation" after an expatriation, no such thing as an unadulterated essence, source text, or origin, engrained in "natural" frontiers to restore.

The humorous meditation "Making Love to a poem," at the end of *The Boatride* collection, precisely explores issues of multilingualism, identity and translation, and subverts all the questions of ownership, propriety and property – in the sense of what is proper, what is mine. Many of the fragments start with "whether … whether". The poet does not select or choose between possible alternatives but plays with them contrapuntally and makes of this position of non-belonging a condition of creativity. He also shows that the frontiers between languages, between outsiders and natives, minorities and the rest, are matter of purity and hierarchy in the Indian context.

> I've written in 2 languages from the start […]
> switching from the one to the other freely
> without asking myself whether I had the right to write
> in either […]
>
> writing ten in one language then a few in another
> sometimes writing 3 altogether new poems
> in an attempt to translate one poem
> or indulge in cannibalism

> or sometimes constructing one poem
> out of material taken from 10 discarded poems
> stolen / salvaged / plundered
> from rubbish heap / junkyard / graveyard […]
>
> whether it's only a reflection
> of cultural schizophrenia
> creative schizophrenia split personality
> whether I'm just one poet writing in 2 languages
> or in fact 2 poets writing in 2 different languages […]
> whether I wipe my arse with one eat with the other
> use one to wipe my arse one to eat with
>
> or whether my use of 2 languages can be likened
> to the way I use my 2 hands
> relegating one to minor jobs or certain taboo functions […]
>
> I'll create such confusion
> that nobody can be sure about what you [Tukaram] wrote and what I did
>
> Will the real Ramanujan please stand up
> There are several of them as you know
>
> A. K Ramanujan is a legion rather than an individual
> There is a multitude of Ramanujans
> the poet of course, the translator, the folklorist
>
> I don't claim to know all of them […]
> Ramanujan and his doubles

Am I a Marathi writer, an English writer? What is the original text? What is the translation? Am I two or one or many? What is the difference between Tukaram's poetry and mine? Which is which? What is *mine*? Reality is inexhaustible and inexhaustibly plural. Hovering over boundary lines, Kolatkar's whole poetry refuses to be circumscribed and defined once and for all in a language, a belonging, a culture. There is no "real" A. K. Ramanujan, no "real" Kolatkar, no legitimate, proper "Indian" language, no minor or major, authentic Indianness, and no *natural* or *national* property of identity:

> To create a poem means to translate from the mother tongue into another language … No language is the mother tongue. For that reason I do not understand when people speak of French or Russian poets. A poet can write in French, but he cannot be a French poet… Orpheus exploded and broke up the nationalities, or stretched their boundaries so wide that they now include all nations, the dead and the living.
> Marina Tsvetayeva in a letter to Rainer Maria Rilke ("Making Love to a Poem")

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Unknowable or Comprehensible – Two Attitudes to Life and Death in Modern Hindi Prose

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Abstract

The paper deals with the approach of Hindi literature to understanding the nature of God through the realization of the nature of Life and Death. The focus is on two novels by two prominent novelists: *Apne–apne ajnabī* (To Each His Stranger, 1961) by Sachchidananda Hirananda Vatsyayana "Ajneya" (or "Agyeya", 1911–1987) and *Ai, laṛkī* (Hey, Girl!, 1991) by Kṛṣṇā Sobtī (b. 1925).

The main characters in Ajneya's prose are often people who oppose conservative society and experience a feeling of exclusion and detachment from the common world. In his early stories the characters are based on events from the Russian revolution, and in his later creations are lonely heroes. Some of Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's heroines could also be understood as marginal characters, but they try to overcome this marginality and sometimes work actively to reach their goal. As a rule, they finally succeed. The reader is left with a feeling that Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's heroines' attitudes to life on the whole are very positive.

In my paper I proceed from the assumption that the creations of both writers combine a western and an Indian approach to understanding and representing the world. The novels look very similar in composition, in the construction of the main characters, and in the way they highlight key elements. But Ajneya and Kṛṣṇā Sobtī in these novels reached practically opposite results depicting their protagonists in the margin between Life and Death, in search of God, attempting to understand the meaning of their existence. For Yoke, one of Ajneya's heroines, rebellion against the world and against God is practically the only way to realize Truth. Rebellion is her existential choice. At the same time the writer presents Selma as an alternative heroine.

The novel by Kṛṣṇā Sobtī , written about 30 years later than Ajneya's, might be viewed as a woman-writer's attempt to subvert Ajneya's existentialist pattern. The interplay between the two texts seems to me very important for understanding the attitude of both writers to the challenges that life and death pose to human beings.

Keywords: Hindi novel, women's writing, Hinduism, existentialism, Life and Death, Ajneya, Kṛṣṇa Sobtī

1. "Eternal questions", a quest for God and Indian literature

Are Life and Death unknowable or can they be comprehended? What should be one's attitude towards them? Both questions appear to be strongly connected with a quest for God, which continues to be one of the most important themes of world literature. The quest for God is associated with the pursuit of truth and with so-called eternal questions – who are we, where do we come from, and where are we going? In the past, a religious person would have an answer for these questions, but thinkers and philosophers would not accept a set explanation. Instead they would continue their pursuit of the truth, which was somehow also reflected in literature. The interpretation of the theme and the responses to existential challenges changed radically in the 19th and 20th centuries, when literature began to reflect on the inner world of the hero and later entered into the epoch of "the death of God," as the famous statement of Friedrich Nietzsche goes.

Modern Indian literature investigates the question of whether or not God is comprehensible by searching in two main directions, as I see it. In the first case, God, or a sense of the divine, is accepted as an unquestioned fact, according to the status of a person as Hindu, Jain, Muslim, or member of another community. Growing up, the person develops a certain identity and religious consciousness and some kind of devotion to this or that God. This kind of identity is taken for granted, and only some radical changes in a person's or society's life could lead to a personal urge to search for God on an individual path or even force him/her to convert. In the Indian context, the multitude of religious traditions leads to constant trans-religious interaction among different conceptions and ideas, traditions, holy places, rituals, habits, and so on. Since the times of Medieval Bhakti the question of whether God is present in the temple or rather in the heart of the devotee has constantly been under discussion; whether God is to be reached through the path of love, through individual service, adoration, and proper or good deeds, through the path of knowledge, or by performing rituals and strictly following traditions. Modern Hindi literature to some extent continues to discuss such questions. At the same time for a person living in the late 20th and early 21st century, in an age of constantly growing alienation and isolation of the individual, the dimensions of this pursuit appear to be particularly complex. In general, I think, Hindi literature answers the question "Is God alive?" positively.

To my mind, Ajneya's *Apne-apne ajnabī* (*To each his stranger*, 1961) and Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's *Ai, laṛkī* (*Hey, Girl!,* 1991) clearly represent an approach to and a perception of Life and Death, an attitude toward and an acceptance of God in the Hindi Literature of the second part of the 20th century. In this article I will try to compare these two novels by two prominent Hindi writers who – each in his or her own way – were very much concerned with the above mentioned issues.

From the very beginning of Ajneya's literary career, the main hero of his prose was a person following the path of "Resistance and rebellion" and experiencing a feeling of exclusion from the common world. Some of Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's heroines also could be understood as marginal (Mitro Marjani of *"Mitro Marjānī,"* Ratti of *Sūrajmukhī andhere ke* – "Sunflowers in Darkness" or Mahak Banu of *Dil-o-dāniś* – "Heart and Mind"[1]), but they try to overcome this marginality and sometimes reach their goal through rebellion, or at least through clear and open protest. And this protest may be against God as well.

The main characters of both writers express their rebellious or marginal natures in different ways, and the reasons for their rebelliousness and marginality also differ. The main difference, to my understanding, is that Ajneya is mainly interested in the scope of his protagonist and his relations between him and society as a whole, while in most of Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's novels, a heroine is opposed to her family as a part of the community/society. At the same time, both writers' main characters think about existential questions while trying to find a reason for living or dying. Ajneya shows this way of thinking overtly, using a diary or inner monologue of a hero who usually acts only after a deep reflection. In contrast to this, many heroines of Kṛṣṇā Sobtī are not such profound thinkers; instead they often are common women who lead usual, everyday lives. Many of them act spontaneously, without much consideration. Nevertheless the author skillfully shows that even an ordinary person cannot avoid the quest for truth and for God. Her heroines live, act, and talk about life;in this way they are able to understand or accept God and the end of life. This end may be called death, but it need not mean "a complete end", "eternal emptiness." It is "a liberation of a body and a soul" (*dehātm kā nistārā*)[2] and finally līlā, divine play created and led by God.

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[1] An English translation of this novel was published under the title *The Heart Has Its Reasons*. Translated by Reema Anand and Meenakshi Swami. New Delhi: Katha 2005.

In opposition to this, Ajneya's heroine Yoke, for example, starts thinking and then comes to the conclusion that "Death is the only form of perception and knowledge of God."[3] She reflects on this mystery (*rahasya)* and wonders why "a cemetery for one and a liberation of another happen at one and the same moment" (*ek kā madfan aur dūsre kā nistār ek sāth ek hī kṣaṇ meṃ hotā hai).*[4] This word – a mystery, *rahasya* – also represents some kind of a margin which attracts the heroine and leads her to deeper reflections. Only then she will act – in a way which would not be possible or even thinkable for Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's heroines.

It is interesting that both novels display practically identical plots in many sections and have very similar settings of protagonists.They are both women, one young, one old, standing – or placed – at the threshold of Life and Death. The old one is waiting for Death, the young one is a witness, but not a passive one. She also takes an active part: she helps and cares for a dying woman or reflects on and tests the situation to find a reason for what is happening to her and the other character. This position – especially as it is represented in the novels – makes a discussion on the problem of attaining or losing God inevitable.

2. Ajneya's and Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's novels: similarity or difference

In the novels we can find rather similar points of view on the main problems discussed by the authors through the representation of their heroines. In both novels, the narration is mainly achieved through the 1st person narration or a dialog on life and death, relations between generations and relatives, eternity and momentariness, transience of existence, etc. One of the reasons for this, to my understanding, is the composition of the novels and the special atmosphere the writers create for their heroines. It is a clean world – with a minimum of common, everyday details – yet at the same time not "laboratory sterile". In their own world the heroines can discuss and consider eternal problems, to find a sense and meaning for being or not being.

The theme of the existence of God, as I understand it, is the main problem of these two novels. What is the role of the divine in the life of an individual and society? What are Life and Death? The authors, each in their own way, reach different conclusions. The difference can perhaps be explained with reference to the Indian – especially Hindu – mentality, in the case of Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's novel *Ai, laṛkī.* This is also confirmed by her novel *Dilo-dāniś*, in which Hinduism and Islam coexist and confront each other. Ajneya shows a more Europe-oriented point of view, based on Christian views and with a somewhat Buddhist undercurrent, although it is not primarily focused on religion, but rather on philosophy. Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's main heroine – the old dying Mother- Ammu/Ammijī – represents the Indian perspective (Hinduism as a way of life). For her, the existence of Hindu gods is just a fact of reality and she abandons life contentedly. She knows that her life will be continued by her daughter's life: "By giving birth to a daughter a mother will live forever…".[5]

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[2] Krishna Sobtī 1991: 10.

[3] *Maut hī to īśvar kā ekmātr pahcānā jā saknevālā rūp hai* (Ajneya 2001:41).

[4] Ajneya 1961: 80.

Ajneya was very much influenced by Marxism and by the Russian revolutionary movement. This is particularly visible in his first collection of stories *Vipathagā* ("She who follows a wrong path"), written in a Delhi jail (published in 1937) and in his first novel *Śekhar: ek jīvanī* – "Śekhar: a biography" (1941 – 44). In his early stories we meet Russian characters, like Maria Ivanovna in the title story of the collection, *Vipathagā*, or three friends Maxim, Leon, and Anton in *Vivek se baṛhkar* ("Above a mind, a reason") and the three friends Nikolay, Sergey, and Dmitriy in *Milan* ("A meeting"). It is worth noticing that all these characters are foreigners (like the characters of his last mentioned novel, apart from Jagannathan – a stranger who will appear in the final episode of *Apne–apne ajnabī*). Plots of Ajneya's three early stories are taken from the history of the Russian revolutionary movement. It was a world of atheism opposing Christianity. These stories were written in the 1930s. In the Forties came Śekhar – the hero of Ajneya's first novel.

After his dramatic personal experiences in prison and his subsequent period of disillusionment, Ajneya took a great interest in Buddhism and in French existentialism. His last novel *Apne-apne ajnabī* can be understood as a demonstration of a European approach to the problem of God,[6] but in two variants. Selma, one of the heroines, an *old* woman with faith in God, dies content. In contrast to her is a *young* heroine, Yoke, who makes her "existential" choice. Yoke spends several weeks alone with the dying Selma in a small, isolated cottage high in the mountains, cut off from the outer world by snow. They have long discussions during this period, and when Yoke is finally released, she prefers death as her choice. In the narration we come to know that she was forced to become a prostitute – *veśyā* –in a town occupied by the Germans during World War II, and for her this meant "Yoke has died" (*Yoke mar gayī*). The heroine chooses a new name – Mariam: "Mariam never dies" (*Mariam kabhī nahīṃ martī).*[7] Nevertheless, the young heroine commits suicide at the end of the novel.

The reader is left to think about why her choice was exactly this and not another, why Yoke constantly repeated that she had made her choice of her own free will.[8] This choice – just like the life of Yoke as a whole could be interpreted as a clear illustration of the existentialist philosophical conceptions of "critical points", "border situations" or a "problem of choice". If so, the reader can apprehend the novel as a dialog between Ajneya and European philosophers –from Heidegger to Sartre.[9] Most readers followed this way, and, it certainly helps in understanding the novel.

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[5] Sobtī 1991: 56.

[6] Annie Montaut discussed this very popular opinion regarding Ajneya in her article "Western Influence on Hindi Literature: a Dialogical Process: Agyeya's Apne-apne ajnabī"(Montaut 1992). I will return to the article later. Even in the *Encyclopaedia of The Hindu World* Ganga Ram Garg (ed.), New Delhi 1992, the novel was characterized as "an existentialist work describing the psychological state of two women who are besieged in a house buried under snow" (Garg 1992: 234).

[7] Ajneya 1961: 87.

[8] Ajneya 1961: 86–87.

At the same time, the reader can read *Apne-apne ajnabī* as a literary creation, paying attention to each and every small detail. If we choose this way of reading, then we should concentrate on the "mirror" structure of the novel and compare the lives and behavior of Selma and Yoke, recollect the times and places when and where their lifes unfolded. Moreover we should think of Ajneya as not making a "modern, fashionable choice" when writing his novel at a time when the philosophy of existentialism was at the peak of its popularity, but rather appreciate the writer's constant pursuit of truth and striving for a proper choice between right and wrong, honesty, and dishonesty; loyalty and betrayal.

The setting of the novel is a situation very similar to that which can be found in his early story *Vivek se baṛhkar*. This story is set in the in plains of Siberia, covered by snow, and is easily comparable to the snowy mountains of *Apne-apne ajnabī*. Here the protagonists make their choice not to betray their friend, and die exclaiming "Russia! Long live the revolution!"[10] Śekhar, the hero of Ajneya's first novel, also comes across such "border situations" and is "re-born." This happens in a prison, where he has the support of other prisoners. After some time, Śekhar accepts a new life – not that of a terrorist but of a religious person.

It is noteworthy that in *Apne-apne ajnabī* the two main heroines have counterparts in two male secondary characters. In the narration, Selma Dolberg is connected to Yan Ekelof, in an episode that takes place in 1906, about 40 years before Selma and Yoke meet; as for Yoke, she has her friend Paul. Contrary to the heroines, who are strangers to each other, these male personages are not lonely. Yan, in a crucial situation on the ruins of a bridge,[11] when only three persons survived after a catastrophic flood and an earthquake, keeps in touch with another secondary character, a photographer. Paul, with whom Yoke had planned to spend Christmas vacations, finally comes with his friends to rescue her. In this way the male personages represent the outer world; they are not alone in it, not isolated; even after a disaster they search for a social community, personal contact with someone else. In the same way, in Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's novel, three male characters (Son, Brother in law, and Doctor) represent Life and Help coming from the outside to a closed female world, where women are isolated in their quest for understanding the nature of Life and Death.

Marginality is expressed on many levels in *Apne-apne ajnabī*. The margin itself confirms that everything in the world is tightly connected and cannot exist without each other. There are oppositions, so a border between them is inevitable. Let us consider, for example, spatial opposition: there are plains and mountains, a small house set on the central part of a bridge where Selma lives between two other split parts,[12] and a lonely cottage situated high in the mountains. Time is seen as a force majeure opposing a normal way of life: flow of water associated with *pralaya*, an earthquake, a snowfall, the Second World War. Elsewhere it is Christmas Eve, meaning a turning point, a boundary both in a religious and a natural context (solstice). There is an opposition between Light and Darkness – two symbols of Life and Death: sunshine and sun beams opposed to darkness and night, in a hill cottage isolated from its surrounding by white snow.

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[9] The popularity of J.P. Sartre among Indian writers and thinkers might be illustrated by an epigraph to a novel "Marīcikā" (1981) by the contemporary Hindi writer Ganga Prasad Vimal: "Baiḍ pheth nāṭ kam fram āuṭsāiḍ ṭu hyuman riyaliṭī" – Sartr (Vimal 1981 : 5).

[10] Ajneya 2001: 198.

[11] This old bridge is described in the novel as a very big one, with shops where shopkeepers also live. For me, as a reader, this bridge resembles Ponto Veccio in Florence.

Selma feels that she has been left all alone, in opposition to the whole world, and in the 1906' episode she does not feel any compassion towards the two other men or unity with them in the face of death. She has to find confirmation through her own life experience that she is all alone in the universe before she begins her quest for God and she finds God in compassion and love. But, before the heroine gets an answer, she must to overcome the margin, perform a rite of passage. It is understood in the novel that only marginal situations, not common ones, can create conditions for understanding whether Life and Death are unknowable or are comprehensible, whether God can be reached or not.

Yoke – in contrast to Selma – does not manage to convince herself of the existence of God, and that is the reason why she finally commits suicide. The last scene of the novel is very important and clarifying. Before leaving this mortal world, Yoke adopts the Judeo-Christian name Mariam and confesses to a Hindu man named Jagannāthan.[13] Not only has she chosen the time of her own death (when she met "a good man" whom she could not regard as a stranger), but she consciously chose for herself the name of God's Mother, the Virgin Mary.[14] What is more important, the chosen "good man" is a person whom she could trust and ask for forgiveness. In the same way, Selma had asked Yoke to forgive her before she died. "I have chosen. We do not choose a stranger, we choose a good man. In him I will live. Nathan, forgive me."[15] For Yoke, this "good man" is Jagannāthan. He had forgiven Mariam, not actually knowing for what, maybe for her strange, provocative behavior in a shop where they had met by chance, and he was chosen by Yoke-Mariam. This is a reciprocal act: She does the same – she "forgives" him. In this way, a particular continuity is established. Yoke-Mariam also forgives somebody else (*usko bhī*)[16] and Jagannāthan manages to find out that this is not Paul, Yoke's friend (she calls him "a stranger"), but God who is named by Yoke-Mariam as "īśvar" "the Lord."

Yoke-Mariam dies with the name of God on her lips. In the Hindu tradition this is very important, as in the bhakti tradition it has meant salvation at the time of death since time immemorial. However, the rebellious Yoke opposes God by committing suicide. Earlier she was even ready to commit a mortal sin – to kill Selma after staying with her in their "snow prison" for a long time. The end of the novel suggests that Yoke is free to choose between Life and Death, and that maybe after Death she will know the truth. Some of Yoke's reflections regarding this subject, so important for her, can be found in her diary, in an entry dated 6 January.

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[12] Ajneya 1961: 55.

[13] The Sanskrit word *Jagannāth* means "Lord, Ruler of the World.". In the novel Ajneya used the form Jagannāthan, the South Indian version of the name, which at the same time relates Jagannathan to the biblical name of the prophet "Nathan" (compare footnote 14).

[14] Ajneya 1961: 86.

[15] Ajneya 1961: 87.

[16] Ajneya 1961:88.

We should note that the time setting is the Orthodox Christian Christmas Eve. In general, the novel is based on Christian symbolism. The reader knows that Selma is a Christian; the names of two male personages of the novel, Paul and Yan (Ioan) also carry Christian overtones. Even the last action – though not the final *word* of the novel – is a sign of the cross that an unknown old man makes towards empty skies (*sūne akaś meṃ*). The sign also looks like a stranger in the empty sky,[17] bringing a reader back to the title of the novel "To Each His Stranger." So we can interpret the novel by Ajneya not only as an "existentialist" novel, but also as a symbolic enactment of a kind of Christian quest for God.

This "empty and open" end of the novel provides an opportunity to propose different interpretations of the meaning of the novel itself. In my opinion, Yoke-Mariam's behavior confirms that the first and final wish of a living being, towards the end of life, is to be alive. Any individual naturally wants a continuation, wants to be preserved in one way or another. Even if a person is a stranger to herself, as in the novel by Ajneya, she should find "a good one" – so that life can continue, go on, even after she personally does not exist physically. A person can neither exist nor perish into non-existence alone; someone is required to share, accompany, and support her life and death experience. Ajneya skillfully cites a *śloka* by Bhartrihari "*bhogā na bhuktā vayam eva bhuktāḥ*" applying it to a modern context. "*Akele vaḥ bhoge bhugtā hī nahīn.*":[18] "if enjoyed alone, it cannot be enjoyed" (tr. by Annie Montaut 1991: 128). This "good man" could have any name, God, or *īśvar,* or *Jagannāthan*, or Buddha. The last name was not mentioned in the novel but there were many indirect hints of Buddhism. The name is just a sign, not comprehensible for some, but full of sense for others.

Certainly, Ajneya himself was one of those who understand themselves basically as seekers for the eternal truth. It is also worth noticing that his B.Sc. degree was obtained from Forman Christian College in Lahore (in 1929). Naturally, as an author, he could not give a definite answer to any of the eternal questions. Still, they form the basis of his mental and literary world. No doubt, his own life experience was a basis for creating the characters of his novels and stories. Sentenced to imprisonment for conspiracy in colonial times, he himself had plenty of time to reflect on Life, Death, and God.

Like Rabindranath Tagore, Ajneya was a cosmopolitan, interested in the world's cultural and religious experience, not only that of the Hindu world. May be this is one of the reasons why his works attract the attention of readers and scholars; they are perhaps more readily appreciated by non-Indian readers than other pieces of Hindi literature. And this is also one of the ways "not to be alone." We can find confirmation of it also through an analysis of the names of Ajneya's heroes: Selma from the last novel corresponds to Sister Hilda, a character in his early short story *Vivek*

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[17] Ajneya 1961:88.
[18] Ajneya 1961: 72.

se baṛhkar. Old Selma's surname is Ekelov, which closely resembles *akelī* or *akele* – "alone." This word is often connected with Selma, thus Yoke is left after Selma's death– without this old woman – herself *akelī*.[19] The heroine's reflections about Life and Death fit together with this: she compares them to a closed fist and an open palm, or recollects a story about a monk who dug a tunnel from his solitary monastic cell only to find in the end another closed lonely cell. We should also keep in mind that in 1957–58 the writer traveled to Japan. The dedication – *Jīn Lain kī smṛti ko ("To the memory of Jīn Lain")* – confirms that the novel has an international, open appeal, going beyond margins and borders.

There is one more resemblance between Ajneya and Tagore. Tagore created the notion of *Jibon-debota* – the God of Life. In every natural creature he saw an expression and manifestation of this God. But Tagore himself had to go through a long process of reflection and searching for God, and make many attempts in order to understand the nature of Life and Death and express them in his literary creations.[20]

It is an irony and a small paradox, even a *rahasya* ("mystery"), that Ajneya's last novel, even though labeled by an Indian critic not to be "regarded as very satisfactory,"[21] even after so many years attracts the attention of both general readers (I use the 17th paperback edition) and scholars – both in India and abroad. For example, Annie Montaut's seminal article shows that the novel is a good example of the "dialogical relation between western (existentialist) and Indian poles," which appealed to readers in the 1960s. It could be understood that Ajneya, while discussing eternal questions and philosophical problems, was somehow far ahead of his own time.

In Soviet Russia, Ajneya was considered a "modernist", an epithet that at that time meant "decadent", deserving of disdain; nevertheless, his poetry and prose attracted the attention of Indologists. Soviet scholar Svetlana Eminova dedicated a chapter in her book "Tradition and Innovation in Modern Indian Prose" to novels by Ajneya and particularly to *Apne-apne ajnabī*.[22] She concluded her analysis of the novel by concessing with the opinion of many Indian critics (Devraj, Induprakash Randeya, Prabhakar Machve) who characterized the novel as "existential and modernistic." Comparing "To Each His Stranger" with two previous novels by Ajneya, S. Eminova stressed that "an exploitation of naked devices inevitably leads to the deconstruction of the artistic texture of a creation. A philosophic task is accomplished, but it has led to the creation of a particularly "esoteric" piece of literature and the writer was branded as "elitist."[23] In the Soviet times, such a characterization did not sound as a negative to a "knowing, a specially prepared reader" but rather like an invitation to read the novel and learn more about the author. As for my personal opinion, I think that this novel should be considered not only a logical result of Ajneya's artistic development, but also a landmark of Hindi literature, as it stated out some directions and trends further developed in the creations of later Hindi writers.

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[19] Ajneya 1961: 79.

[20] In this connection see Н.А.Вишневская 2010: 20–56. The Russian Indologist Natalia Vishnevskaya wrote her article "A Man between Life and Death", based mainly on creations of R. Tagore, and discussed the problem thoroughly.

[21] Ram Awadh Dvivedi. *A Critical Survey of Hindi Literature*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1967 (cit. by Montaut 1992: 118). In my personal conversations with Indian critics and professors of Literature, as well some Russian Indologists, the same opinion was expressed.

[22] Eminova 1987: 44–57.

[23] Eminova 1987: 57.

Like the novel by Ajneya, Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's *Ai, laṛkī* to some extent can be regarded as *prayogvādī*, experimental. I would dare characterize it as "a nazira," as opposed to Ajneya's *Apne-apne ajnabī* (even the titles rhyme a little bit, and these two novels are practically of the same length), written 30 years later. Though the writer herself calls the book a novel,[24] in fact it looks more like a play with lines spoken by three heroines and a minimum of comments by the author. The two protagonists are mother (Ammū) and daughter, Girl (Laṛkī); there is also one other character – a maid, Susan; she addresses Ammū as Ammījī and the girl – respectfully as Dīdī. The name Susan sounds like a Christian name – one more indication of the closeness of the two novels discussed here. We can call *Ai, Laṛkī* a woman-writer's novel about women. The plot also has an autobiographical background,[25] however Kṛṣṇā Sobtī insisted that the main heroine did not represent her mother only, but that several persons were combined there. "Besides, it is Mother (Māṃ) who is the soul of this creation."[26]Actually, this "*laṃbī kahānī*" ("long story"), as K.B. Vaid called the novel,[27] according to my understanding, is a very serious, multi-level creation, considering practically the same problems which had been discussed by Ajneya.

Like Yoke and Selma, Ammū and the "girl" are waiting for Death to come – mother is very ill and two girls are taking care of her, not leaving a small house (or a flat). The main action takes place in Mother's room. The girl goes out to fetch something, but very soon returns to listen to Mother's memories. When Laṛkī goes out for a while, the room becomes "empty" (*beraunak*)[28] for Ammū. The only other character is a doctor, who comes for a short visit. There is a connection with the outer world – by phone. Members of a "large family" (Son and Ammū's brother in law) and the doctor sometimes call, but they usually talk with Laṛkī. In contrast to the world of Ajneya's novel – dark, cold, snowy, without any hope of escape and with a very small ray of sunlight which Selma did not manage to see before her death – the atmosphere in Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's novel is light, in both senses of the word. Nevertheless, Ammū demands more light and becomes angry if a lamp is turned off. There are gusts of wind and fresh air, the twittering of birds and reminiscences, memories, recollections – as if Mother wants to give her whole life to her daughter and in this way to preserve and continue it. The time of the novel (if we do not include the

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[24] Kṛṣṇā Sobtī in conversation with Kṛṣṇa Baldev Vaid, characterized *Ai, laṛkī* as belonging to the novel genre (*upanyās*, Sobtī-Vaid 2007: 72), despite this creation lacking some of the common characteristics of a novel: an epic form, a variety of personages, a ramified plot. The narration is limited to a few monologues by a main character and the "novel" consists of four characters' lines of dialog (Ammū, Girl, Susan and Doctor) and short remarks by an author as narrator. The English translation of the novel is published in "The Little Magazine" as a "story". *Ai, laṛkī* also was put on stage which confirms this novel's dramatic form.

[25] I am grateful for this information to Mariola Offredi.

[26] Sobtī-Vaid 2007: 72–73.

[27] Interview with K.B. Vaid in Delhi, 2007.

[28] Sobtī 1991: 12.

"biographical time" of the Mother) is much shorter than in Ajneya's novel – just one or two days. But it is enough to show the entire picture of the relationship between mother and daughter, and to stress the main idea: "By giving birth to a daughter a mother will live forever … This is a source of creation (*beṭī ke paidā hote hī māṃ sadājīvī ho jātī hai. Vah kabhī nahīṃ martī ... vahī sṛṣṭi kā srot hai*).[29]And earlier, at the very beginning of the novel, the same idea is expressed in a slightly different way: "Becoming a daughter you have become my mother and me…" (*beṭī hokar tum merī māṃ banī ho … aur main…*).[30] This clearly is a hint of an eternal circle of Life overcoming Death.

Sometime tensions arise between the heroines, but they do not lead to outbursts or cruelty. There are elements of alienation, but the reader feels them mainly in connection with male members of the family who never appear in Mother's room and very rarely talk to her by phone. There is no need for Laṛkī (the "girl") to complain or rebel. If she were to need something, then, considering her character, the reader could expect her to display *ahiṃsā*, in a very Indian, Hindu way. So the last sentences of the novel are: the girl assures her mother that everything will be fine (*sab ṭhīk ho jāyegā!*) and then there is "deep-drawn sigh, a trembling and everything is peaceful in the room."[31] Mother is shown as neither being afraid nor as expressing any special, specific reflections regarding the nature of God and Death. As was noted earlier, for Mother death is "a liberation of a body and a soul" (*dehātm kā nistārā*)[32] and life is *līlā*, divine Play. It is noteworthy that Ammī addresses to the doctors "my patient" (*merā marīz*) – because he cannot understand a reason of her illness. As for Ammū, she knows that some pretext for *dehātmā kā nistārā* – liberation of a body and a soul – is necessary, and that this is her illness.

Ammū knows some eternal truth with certainty, and only has to recollect her life, starting from early childhood up to the present. She just wants to pass on all her knowledge to the girl, her daughter. The author constantly stresses – with the help of her heroine – that she will live in future generations and there is no question of her being afraid. Selma also manages to retell her life story to Yoke, but this does not help the young woman to survive and overcome the temptation to make "her own choice" and die.

Laṛkī and Susan, as the reader can understand from the novel, are not married, so they cannot follow, at least at the moment, the motto of Ammī "Giving birth to a daughter a mother will live forever." The main difference between the novels' heroines is that Kṛṣṇā Sobtī's Ammū, Laṛkī and Susan do not actually feel this "strangeness" – neither towards the others, nor towards each other. Maybe, the woman- writer's answer to Ajneya is this: first of all a person should love him/herself and those who are close to her. This will teach her how to love (not to choose for love and forgiveness) not only "a good man" (*acchā ādmī*) as Yoke-Mariam did, but any "stranger" who then will become not a stranger at all.

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[29] Sobtī 1991: 56–57.
[30] Sobtī 1991: 9.
[31] Sobtī 1991: 119.
[32] Sobtī 1991: 10.

If this happens, the “empty sky” will become like the “Kingdom of the Lord.” If not, at least “everything will be peaceful in the room,” as in the finale of *Ai, Laṛkī*.

To my understanding, Kṛṣṇā Sobtī gives a message of “*śānti*.” And this is a reason why the novel by Kṛṣṇā Sobtī, written about 30 years later than Ajneya’s, might be viewed as a “stylistically alternative model” that tends to subvert the one by Ajneya. The interplay between the two texts is also very important for understanding the attitude of both writers to “ideology and cultural aesthetics” which changed with the passage of time. Working on my article, I proceeded from the assumption that the works of both writers combine a western and an Indian approach to understanding and representing the world. The passing of time shows that the so-called “Indian approach” becomes more universal while the “western” one is also changing.

Being brought up in the traditions of classical Russian literature, I would like to conclude my comparison of the two novels with a quotation from a poem by Pushkin:

> “И долго буду тем любезен я народу,
> что чувства добрые я лирой пробуждал»
>
> “I will be loved by people for a long-long time, because by my lyre I have awakened good and kindly feelings”.

Both Indian writers follow this path; or in other words, God, or the purpose and meaning of Life and Death, is to be approached and found on the path of love. A more recent and in my opinion good example of this is the novel “Māī” by Gītāṃjali Śrī. Three generations of women are described in this text, in which the relations between a daughter, a mother, and a grandmother/mother-in-law continue to show the search for answers to eternal questions related to Life, Death, and God, answers that can be obtained on the path of Love. The novel itself also shows that a tradition continues, and that contemporary Hindi literature pays attention to and values what has been written and discussed in the second part of the twentieth century elsewhere in the world.

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Q&A on Sunny Singh's short story *A Cup Full of Jasmine Oil.*

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Abstract

With its rich semantic texture and evocative imagery Sunny Singh's short story *A Cup Full of Jasmine Oil* invites various readings. The story tells how a young girl is both attracted and confused when her grandmother's neighbor, who lives in a lesbian relationship, massages her skull and oils her curly hair. When the grandmother at one point forbids the oiling sessions, the girl suddenly becomes aware of hidden meanings and intuitions associated with this practice.

The essay juxtaposes a reading of the story from a more conventional western perspective with an interpretation from the point of the Indian system of aesthetics based on *rasa.* From this double perspective, it discusses various stylistic and thematic aspects of the story. Diverging interpretations are presented of the role of the characters, the functionality of their characterization, and the use of description and suggestion to evoke the semantic framework of the story.

The juxtaposition of two readings was prompted by a discussion with the author during a conference panel on rebellion in modern Indian literature and film. To prevent the impression of imposing a "scholarly" reading on a more "intuitive" reading, the essay continues the dialogue with the author and invites her to react to the reading and discuss the notion of an "Indian" aesthetic model, its relevance for her writing, and current critical approaches to modern Indian fiction. In her response, Sunny Singh explains how the theme of the story was prompted by her perception of the sharing of knowledge of sexuality and intimacy in a tightly-knit Indian social context. The discussion with the author extends beyond the specific story, and she presents her views on how her scholarly knowledge of modern Indian culture stimulates her in her creative work. Thereby, it aptly frames the exploration of a reading of *A Cup Full of Jasmine Oil* from the perspective of Indian literary aesthetics.

Keywords: Indian English literature, Sunny Singh, lesbian relationships, sexuality, Indian women

This essay sets out to experiment with a reading of Indian literature written in English that is complemented by a dialogue with the author. A conversation of this kind actually took place in the context of the panel on "Rebellion" at the 2010 European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies (21. ECMSAS) in Bonn, where Sunny Singh read the story *A Cup Full of Jasmine Oil* and discussed it with the members of the panel. The discussion revealed that, although a reading that focuses exclusively on the psychological development of characters is perfectly capable of producing meaning, Singh's writing also invites an interpretation inspired by concepts from Indian literary aesthetics based on the notion of *rasa*. During the discussion, the author appeared to be fully aware of this polyphony, and she recognized the framework of Indian aesthetics as a structuring element in her work.

The analysis of A Cup Full of Jasmine Oil that was discussed with Sunny Singh at the conference juxtaposes a reading based on conventions of western writing with an analysis of the contribution of Indian aesthetics to the rich semantic texture of the story, without giving precedence to one or the other hermeneutic strategy. This reading will be presented in detail here, followed by questions and answers by the author on this reading and other aspects of her writing.

A prominent element in this reading is the functionality of the aesthetic concept of the work in relation to the representation of rebellion. It will argue that the composite aesthetic program of the story aids the representation of a specific form of rebellion in the narrative that arises from the tension between social roles and responsibilities on the one hand and the limited opportunities to experience individual freedom at the other hand. It shows how such freedom can only be experienced at the fringes of the formal social structure, where traditional patterns are less rigid. The discussion with the author yields an interesting additional perspective on the story, which complements the reading presented in this essay.

A Cup Full of Jasmine Oil is only 1600 words long, and consists of a memory by a first person narrator of her encounters with a couple of unmarried women – Anu-di and Vibha-di – during her childhood. She and her grandmother are neighbors of the couple and visit them regularly. On one of these occasions, Anu-di proceeds to oil the girl's short-cut curly hair with jasmine oil, a common practice of Indian women to keep their hair straight and soft and protect it from harsh sunlight. The oiling of the hair, accompanied by massaging the skull, is a sensual but confusing experience for the girl. She washes her hair afterward to get rid of the strong smell. One day, the grandmother abruptly intervenes and stops Anu-di from oiling the girl's hair. After that, relations with the neighboring couple are restored but it is evident that a line has been drawn. Later, on the narrator's wedding day, Anu-di comes to bring her a garland of jasmine and explains to her the true nature of its scent.

> And when I was being dressed for the wedding, Anu-di – still in her girly *churidaar-kameez* [Indian pants] – brought a heavy garland of fresh jasmine. She smiled at me, only half-mischievously, in the mirror as she pinned the flowers to my hair. “Now that you are grown up, you'll know the scent is an aphrodisiac.”

Inner tension

A reading that focuses on the inner tension caused by the girl's incapacity to appreciate and understand what the oiling of her hair with jasmine oil is about, is perfectly capable of producing meaning from the story. Such tension is caused by the girl's unawareness of the prejudices felt by her grandmother against her neighbors. She is fascinated by the couple's free life-style and their distance from conventional Indian family life:

> That they lived by themselves, that they seemed to need no one else but each other; that no family ever visited them; that students from the university seemed to inhabit their house and then disappeared into the world beyond. All invitations, for weddings and engagements, births and pregnancies, would be sent to both of them – Anu-di and Vibha-di. There were never any last names on the envelopes.

When Anu-di oils the girl's hair, she is not insensitive to the strong sensuality of this practice and is also curious, although she cannot yet understand its full meaning. The narration subtly implicates the reader in the tension created by this situation. Although the couple is not explicitly described as lesbian, the reader is informed of the unconventional nature of their relationship. Interesting elements in this respect are the references to the clothing of the women:

> Vibha-di always wore crisp saris, starched and ironed to perfection. But Anu-di wore *churidar-kameez*, looking for all the world like a school-girl with her hair pulled back in two thick plaits.

The mention of their life surrounded by casual friends rather than family marks them as being detached from the order that governs regular society. The suggestion of acceptance of the women's unconventional lifestyle is challenged when the grandmother objects to the oiling of the girl's hair. Suddenly, the women's behavior is qualified as illicit and something in which a young girl should not be involved, although the reason for this it is never explicitly explained to her. She can also at that point not completely understand why this has happened.

The first person narrator does not reflect much on the events, as the narration only registers her reactions. It is only when she "becomes a woman" through marriage, which classifies her into an accepted social category, that the remark by Anu-di makes her understand what actually happened in her childhood. The explanation frames the narrator's memory of the oiling of her hair by Anu-di as belonging to a world that seems lost to her for good with her entering the life of a married woman.

The Indian perspective

Reading Sunny Singh's story without any knowledge of the background of Indian writing or aesthetics is perfectly satisfactory. Yet, the prominent presence of the Indian context and the evocative description provide an incentive to explore alternative hermeneutic strategies, especially those rooted in Indian literary conventions. South Asian culture is no monolith and there is no single "Indian" system of literary aesthetics as such. What is available is a well worked out classical theory of artistic creation and reception based on the concept of *rasa,* which emerges in its earliest forms around the 4th century BC and is passed on and extended until the 17th century AD.

In Indian art of all periods and genres, the influence of these aesthetic theories can be found, but it is in no sense defined by this paradigm. It is more the case that Indian art always shares some elements that can be linked to concepts described by the *rasa* theories. When formulating a reading of modern Indian writing in English that engages with Indian artistic modes, it is therefore fitting to take into account both the concepts from the *rasa* paradigm, as well as the aesthetic practices of Indian writing which developed in the classical genres and in modern vernacular literature.

The classical Indian system of aesthetics is first articulated in the context of drama. It is based on the notion that art should evoke the sensation of a limited number of emotions *(rasa*s*)*. Within *rasa* aesthetics, the goal of art is to provide stimuli that facilitate the experience of emotion in the reader/viewer/hearer that mirrors the represented emotional state. The performer does not transfer his own or his character's emotions, but arouses the experience of an individual emotion in each member of his audience. At its highest expressive level, art evokes a purified form of emotion that is no longer colored by the particular individual instances or stimuli in the minds of the audience, but becomes a generalized (*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa)* experience of the emotion *per se*.

In the course of the development of this aesthetic system, the earliest forms of which have been found in texts dating around the 4th century BC, theorists from various schools added new insights, but left the basic principles intact. It was also extended to other realms, such as religious experience, psychology, or linguistics. An influential religious interpretation equated the experience of purified emotion with mystical enlightenment. The emotion that is felt in this instance was called *śāntirasa* – the emotion of peace. Another important concept in later theories, *dhvani* (lit. 'sound'), came from the realm of linguistics where it refers to the capacity of language and signs to suggest or refer to the non-literal meaning of a word. This concept was integrated into the paradigm of the experience of pure emotions through artistic representations.

The *rasa* paradigm has remained elusive as a tool for analyzing Indian art. Although it is possible to recognize elements from the theories in literature, music, or other form of expression, the system is descriptive rather than prescriptive and seems to have developed its own discourse. Like other Indian theoretical paradigms, it has a penchant for classification rather than for the analysis of artistic creation. A number of genres seem directly modeled on *rasa* theory, but Indian writing from all periods shares notions that can be linked to the basic principles of *rasa* theories.[1]

In a number of elements in *A Cup Full of Jasmine Oil* a link can be found with Indian aesthetic modes or practices of Indian writing. Most striking in this respect are the associations conjured up by the title of the story. The image of the cup of fragrant oil is a perfect tool for the evocation of an emotion which is central to *rasa* aesthetics. The story makes optimal use of the emotional overtones and mood-setting functionality of the jasmine oil, as it refers to the conflicting emotions its fragrant scent evokes in the narrator.

> "Off you go," she would laugh, her voice full of mischief. I would clamber back over the wall, bewildered and uncertain, sure that I hated the scent of jasmine oil, keen to find the next occasion Anu-di would offer to oil my hair. My grandmother would briefly glance at me with sharp, keen eyes, then shoo me off for a bath, as if delaying for another day something she needed to tell me.

The sensual and erotic associations of the oil are expressed in the description of the rinsing of the narrator's hair by Anu-di. The fact that it is involved in an intimate bodily ritual makes it a very strong sign. The apotheosis of the story comes when Anu-di explains the aphrodisiac quality of jasmine oil, but this was already "in the air" and becomes neigh superfluous, so heavily was the story scented with the associations connected with the unguent oil. The references contained in the oil make it a perfect *leitmotif* for setting the mood of the story, preparing the expression of emotion, and leading up to the generalization of this emotion. By its nature, the oil becomes a metaphor for *rasa* and the main emotion of the story itself, as the Sanskrit word literally means "juice". This is also how it effectuates the generalization of the emotions presented in the story.

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[1] For a description of the system of aesthetics based on *rasa*, see*:* Gerow 1971 and De 1963.

Setting the mood is an elementary role of images and of the typecasting of characters in Indian writing, as it assists the expression of the dominant emotion of a work of art. Both in the choice of images, as well as in the representation of characters, stereotypes are preferred over original, innovative images or the individual motivations of the characters. The latter are there primarily to represent recognizable roles that agree with the emotional setup of the story and allow generalization rather than in order to develop into "well-rounded" characters.

The representation of Anu-di and Vibha-di can be seen in this light. They do not change or develop during the story but provide a reference to the emotional complex of love and sexuality, setting a mood through the images with which they are described. The description of the couple is a function of this expressive purpose: the girlish dress of Anu-di contrasts with the crisp, starched, and ironed sarees of Vibha-di – the dress of married women – to emphasize the opposition between the more aggressive, exploring sexuality, and the socially accepted role of the married housewife.

Although the couple appears to express a stable emotional complex, the signal they send out is a disturbing one. Their "abnormality" seems to be accepted by the social context, but the open eroticism of the jasmine oil in the hands of Anu-di causes a sudden breach of this apparent order. Anu-di serves to fill the role of the "trouble-maker", which in many Indian narratives is filled by younger sisters or brothers, setting the narrative in motion by creating chaos and a crisis of emotions.

The character of the grandmother is also interesting in this respect. She is not described in detail but has a crucial role in restoring order. Her intervention may, in a conventional reading, appear conservative or dismissive of the lesbian relationship of Anu-di and Vibha-di and of the "wrong" sexuality implied by the oiling sessions. From another angle, which would comply more with the Indian models, she has an active and positive role. She restores order and thereby facilitates the realization of the story's dominant emotional state, which is marked by the tension between order and the challenge of sexuality, be it the "right" kind associated with married life, or the "illicit" kind in a lesbian relationship. The slippery, unguent nature of the oil is a perfect sign for the conflict of emotions and the challenge in the story. The grandmother's intervention was inevitable, considering her role as guardian of honor and social order. Her action is not necessarily prompted by personal motivation or dislike of the two women, but by her role, which is defined largely by the external social fabric.

At the end of the story, things seem to have been put right by the conventional marriage of the narrator. The universe is whole again. This dimension makes the story more than just a personal account, and turns it into a microcosm that mirrors complex existential questions. In this respect, the way the unconventional life-style of the two women is described is full of significance. Their being independent of family or other social ties, their free life-style, their being visited by loose friends –

these are images that carry a resonance of renunciation *(tyāg)*, the stage of life when one withdraws from society to live the life of an ascetic. It is considered a cultural or religious ideal in South Asian culture, a location for the experience of deepest existential truth, where the individual prevails over the social persona. While this life outside the world can only become a practical goal in life for a limited number of people, it informs many cultural forms and their expression in art. This renunciation is not a neutral ideal, as it is potentially dangerous: ascetics have access to powers that can disrupt the social fabric and the established order of things. Singh's story places the confusing sexuality in this ambivalent context, cut off from social rules and obligations, thereby tapping into a powerful semantic complex. The choice of context contributes to the generalization of the emotions in the story and to its functionality as a microcosmic representation of a larger order.

The miniaturization of great themes is not uncommon in Indian literature and can be found in the Sanskrit epics as well as in modern short stories. The format of the short story lends itself very well to this concept. When all the images and characters in the frame of the story fulfill their set roles, the generalization of the represented emotions is achieved, making the particular stand for the universal.

Rebellion

As mentioned before, the story seems to contain a subtext of rebellion against heterosexual gender roles in the presence of the lesbian couple. Their rebellion is not an active one, the two women live their lives in their own circle of friends and in the small community that is depicted in the story. It presents itself in the life of the girl through the oiling of her hair and prompts correction by the grandmother. This kind of rebellion does not lead to intense drama or irreparable ruptures in the relationships between the protagonists. It is depicted as a tension between expected roles and a disruptive reality that hinders the fulfillment of that role. Indian epics provide interesting examples of such situations, such that of the legendary king Rama, hero of the Ramayana epic, who is prevented by the manipulation of one the king's other wives from succeeding his father and fulfill his destined role as successor to the throne. In modern writing, the protagonist is often torn between traditional role-models and social structures and a modernized world where these concepts lose their meaning. Individual freedom comes with more complexity and choices, which trouble many of the protagonists of modernist fiction in Hindi and other Indian languages.[2]

In the story discussed here, rebellion also has a more positive aspect. Instead of the grave existential crises of the alienated characters in modernist Hindi fiction of the post-Independence period, the ambivalence of the girl is surrounded by and embedded in the safety of familiar characters, a safety that does not seem to have been broken by the grandmother's intervention. The couple is invited to the wedding of the woman who grew out of the little girl. This suggests an alternative to the breakdown of traditional values of modernist fiction. In Singh's story, the confusion caused by being confronted with alternative social behavior is resolved in a more harmonious way than the struggle of a previous generation of urban middle-class youth.

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[2] Various aspects of the protagonists in modern Hindi fiction and cinema have been described in Damsteegt 2003. See also De Bruijn 2003 and 2009.

The perspective of the young girl

A striking element in the story, which is also functional in its thematic layout, is the use of the focalization point of a young girl to narrate the story. Given the importance of clearly defined roles of characters in the Indian aesthetic framework, children have a special role. They are not yet fully taken up in the social fabric that defines the agency of adults, and, instead, represent a stage of life that is free from the obligations of family and societal ties. In contrast to western literature, where youth is often seen as a happy, care-free phase of life, many Indian stories describe this as a lonely state, detached and disconnected from the social world of adults. Children do not have the well-defined social identity of adult characters. In the work of the Hindi author Nirmal Verma (1929–2005) children are often protagonists or provide the focalization point for the narration. They provide an eccentric perspective, from which the situation in the story is perceived without the hermeneutic grid of adult social roles and categories.[3] In that sense, they are closer to the sphere of renunciation, where the idiom of asceticism rules. It is as if renunciation and its individualism at the end of life is the mirror image of the identity-free state of childhood. This is a subtext in the meeting between the girl and Anu-di that helps expand and generalize the images represented in the story.

In Singh's story, the meaning of the oiling of her hair and of Anu-di's innuendo was evident to the girl, but it was perceived objectively, without qualifying it as either right or wrong. She is able to perceive it in a very personal manner. It is only at the end that her perception is framed by her new status as a married woman, at which point she starts to understand the meaning of the jasmine oil. She can now face Anu-di from a distance, without the imminent threat of being overwhelmed by something she does not understand. On the one hand she has lost touch with the uninhibited perception of childhood, while on the other hand it gives her a sense of safety and belonging. Her becoming part of mainstream society through marriage radically cuts her off from the "renunciation" of youth, which may harbor a deeper truth and individuality, but is also confusing and potentially disruptive to the social order.

Suggestion

The most powerful element in Sunny Singh's story, when viewed from the perspective of Indian aesthetics, is that it suggests rather than spells out the emotions. The images do not produce an algorithm that leads to a fixed meaning, but rather incite a range of associations around the main themes of the story. The polyphony of each of these associations adds to their effectiveness.

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[3] These aspects of the perspective of children in Indian fiction are also described by Edwin Gerow for three Bengali novels by Bankim Chandra, Bhabani Bhattacarya, and Bibhuti Bhusan Banerji (1974).

This is particularly relevant for the central character in the story, the young girl who is confronted with a confusing new sensation and a new role in the world of women. The scent of the jasmine oil, the bodily sensation of being held, touched, and massaged by Anu-di, are not an explicitly sexual experience, they rather conjure up a complex of associations, ranging from the safe sensuality of female hair-care to overt sexuality. The author's choice of the proper images adds to the evocative nature of the story. All of these images resonate with concepts that play an important role in Indian life-styles and culture. They silently refer to a vast universe of stories, rituals, and customs that give meaning to life. The hint at this level of referentiality adds enormous depth to the personal account that the story is.

Sunny Singh's story follows in many respects the rules of *rasa*-based aesthetics and the conventions of Indian narratives. The way the scene of the story is set evokes a world that follows a defined order of referentiality. Yet, at the same time, it is full of tension and unexpected emotions. The elements described here provide the story with a semantic layer that is an authentic part of the author's background and may well arise from an unconscious intention to conform to models from Indian writing. Within the broad spectrum of Indian literature, there is no single model that may have inspired her, but the story has overtones of social realist stories from the first half of the last century, by authors such as Premchand (1880—1936). The urban middle-class setting, the absence of an idealist agenda, and the focus on the characters' responses to the situation bring it stylistically closer to more recent writing by post-Independence authors such as Nirmal Verma or Mannu Bhandari (1931).

Synthesis and polyphony

The Indian element is just one of many strands in the rich texture of Singh's prose. The story can stand on its own and be enjoyed without knowledge of the Indian references or understanding of the *rasa* aesthetics. As such, it is a sensitive portrait of a young girl's confusing confrontation with sensuality and the social norms that regulate sexuality. The reading proposed here should not be mistaken for an attempt at essentializing the story. A reading that also takes into account the story's functionality in the context of Indian literary modes does not lead to a more authoritative interpretation. It does open a new dimension in the story that can also be applied to other Indian fiction written in English. The confluence of various semantic schemes gives this literature its rich polyphony.

In the case of this story, the confluence of semantic schemes is functional, as only through the focus on the psychology of the girl and the resonance of cultural values, can the impact of the events be made visible. The polyphony of "western" and "Indian" aesthetics allow for a deep and complex form of characterization.

This is a good point to turn once again to Sunny Singh and ask her some questions in connection to the things mentioned above.

How do you react to the above reading, especially as regards the connection with Indian aesthetic theory and literary traditions?

I find your reading quite complex, layered, and interesting. As a writer, I believe that the creative loop is finally closed by the reader who actively makes meaning of the text. Of course, a more informed and empathic reader can draw a more nuanced and richer meaning from a text. After all, *rasa* can be consumed and enjoyed at various levels depending on the reader's own ability, training, knowledge, and empathy, but only a *rasik* can fully savor it. So the polyphony you mention allows different readers to savor the story at varying levels of meaning and pleasure.

At the same time, I am concerned by the suggestions of heteronormative discomfort in your reading. I wrote the story because I was approached by some people in India who were compiling a LGBT anthology including writing by allies.

Initially, I hesitated as I am conscious of the power of storytelling, the assertion of power that comes with that act, and the ways in which the marginalized have been, and continue to be deprived of that power. I am also very cautious about speaking on behalf of less privileged voices, especially as that apparently helpful act often perpetuates the appropriation of storytelling. Nevertheless, after much deliberation, I thought I had found a way to address some of the issues.

Now I am once again flummoxed. At the risk of going on a tangent: I am reminded of the praise lavished by western friends on Deepa Mehta's *Fire*. In contrast, I remember disengaging completely from that film when one of the female leads declared that "there is no word in our language for what we are doing." I remember thinking which Indian language has no word for LGBT desires and activities? My own favorite term for a lesbian lover is *svayaṃvar-sakhī* from *Kathāsaritsāgar*, which combines traditions of friendship, intimacy, and female agency in a lovely verbal capsule. When I was writing the story, I was remembering the complex ways in which genders and sexuality are constructed in semi-urban and rural parts of India and how they are so different from the dominant, postcolonial heterosexist discourse.

This is why I would disagree with your reading of "illicit" or "wrong" vs "married" and "right" categories. In most traditional Indian homes, young children often experience their initial moment of erotic desire or experience in a homosocial setting. These are linked to conversations amongst adults, family, and social rituals including the one I write of: oiling each-other's hair.

For me the story was more about the difficulties of regulating erotic knowledge in a traditional home where different generations live in close intimacy. So a child may know, intuit and/or understand completely different levels of erotic information. For me, not only does the narrator have no conception of "right" vs "wrong" kinds of sexuality but she has very little conceptualization of any kind of sexual pleasure except what is intuited dimly through sensual pleasures.

And yes, Anu-di is meant to play the role of the mischievous younger sibling or aunt who often precipitates a narrative crisis just as the grandmother is meant to maintain balance. But for me, the crisis is not of lesbian desires but of premature sharing of knowledge.

I think you are also right about the role of the child narrator. However, growing up does not mean the earlier world is lost. I find that an implicitly Biblical reading, drawn from the ideal of childhood as a prelapsarian paradise which is lost by the acquisition of sexual knowledge. For me, the narrator as a bride finally has access to the pleasures she only dimly intuited as a child.

But again, I must reiterate that it is the reader who closes the creative loop. I can have my views, but if the reading works for you, then it is the most valid one.

Where in Indian writing would you locate the sources of influence on your work?

Some influences you have already identified. As a writer from Banaras, I grew up reading first in Hindi. We were not only surrounded by Hindi literature but there was a real sense of pride in the language and how we used it. We were also exposed to other regional literatures, but in Hindi translation. At the same time, we grew up with the oral tradition of not only storytelling but also poetry and the epics. A favorite memory from childhood is staying up late on bedrolls spread out on the roof of our house during summers: my uncles and aunts and grandmother would recite poetry. Then there were Russian children’s story books – again in Hindi. And Hindi films and film songs. Finally, Banaras has a great tradition of the *Rāmlīlā* performances. I think my writing probably shows all these influences.

Unlike many Indian Writers in English, I came to English and most western literature, quite late. I think this is also a reason for the polyphony. Even though I write in English, my imagination is rooted somewhere in Hindi.

This story has an all-female cast of characters. Is this a characteristic of your work and, if so, what significance does it have?

The story has an all-female cast because I wanted to emphasize the domestic centerdness of feminine homosocial spaces in India. I see the difference in queer stories and films from India vs many western traditions. In many western narratives, homosexual relationships happen somewhere “beyond” but not at “home” which is generally conceived of as a heterosexual unit. In comparison, when you look at homoerotic narratives from India, before colonial interruptions and now, they seem to focus on locating the characters at the domestic core. I wanted to emphasize that domestic, familial aspect, and in some ways counter the isolating, expelling narratives of queerness that we receive from US and Europe.

However, I do focus on female characters a lot in my writing. Initially this was due to a limitation in my own craft as I felt I was better at writing women characters. Fortunately, I have since gotten better at writing male characters.

There is also an ideological aspect to this. I began writing female characters that I knew from my rural, semi-urban childhood where "tradition" did not automatically equate oppression, sexual repression, or a lack of female agency. I approach male characters the same way. I don't want the stereotypical patriarchal male, or the effeminate colonized one, or men who are fractured or incapable of emotional intimacy. Again this is rooted in my own experience but also driven by not frequently finding these representations of men in contemporary or recent Indian literature.

Rebellion seems to play a prominent role in your work in many forms. What models do Indian literatures provide for the representation of rebellion? Are these different from what western writing provides?

I am not quite sure what to make of this question. I grew up in various small Indian towns and it seemed that everyone was eccentric, almost as if "rebellion" was the norm. As a teenager we moved to New York and for a while, I thought that I had found my personal paradise of rebellion.

But the older I grow, the more I begin to believe that there is no possibility of rebellion in Hinduism. I don't mean this in some Orientalist superficial way. What I mean is when there is a rationale, justification, and precedent to be found for every act, it is very hard to rebel in the western sense.

Also, it helps that Hinduism does not have a fundamental text or a fundamental god or even laid-in-stone rules. We live by social norms, which can be changed, and there is no real penalty – in the Abrahamic sense – for breaking norms. In a way, if an individual is strong enough to withstand social pressure, they can "rebel" without spiritual, eternal penalties. You don't get thrown out of paradise, or have death and destruction rained down upon you and yours by a vengeful god; you also are not obliged to submit or follow anyone, or accept anything that is told to you. Instead, if you disagree with the orthodoxies and you are the bravest prince in the land, you can rebel against all that is expected of you, and instead of being cast out and punished, you get to be "enlightened" and become Mahavira or Buddha. If you are a great poet and refuse to abide by social rules, you can write your own hagiography and be considered the perfect divine seeker and lover, like Mirabai. In a sense, the crux of the matter isn't the act of rebellion but one's ability to carry it off.

What you get is again the perfect Indic paradox. There is the social imperative to maintain balance and therefore abide by social norms or even the larger orthodoxies. At the same time, there is a clear tradition insisting on relying only on one's own understanding, not believing anything that one is told and following one's own path.

This is the paradox in my writing as well. My characters "rebel" in a western sense of the word, and yet in the Indic sense, they are doing something quite traditional which is discovering and keeping their personal *dharma*. Both my novels have looked at the issue of rebellion, but I think *With Krishna's Eyes* is better at articulating this internal paradox.

For this kind of discussion and understanding, I go back to medieval and classical texts for inspiration and understanding as most recent Indian writing does not satisfy my need for this complexity.

You are a scholar of the aesthetics of Indian literature and cinema. What approach would you recommend to describe and analyze the agency of Indian aesthetic models from the 'past' in contemporary South Asian narrative art?

This is a really difficult question. First we have to acknowledge the extent of rupture caused by colonialism, not only as a political process but as educational, intellectual, and creative processes were deliberately reconstituted. So, for example, Lord Macaulay decides to privilege Manusmriti as the basis for Hindu personal law. The choice of one of the most patriarchal, caste-ist, misogynist and homophobic texts over the more liberal ones is telling. But the impact of this privileging in legal codes and its impact on social formations and systems of education is not yet debated or understood. How did this choice, for example, inform Article 377? How did it help create a nationalist ideal of men and women in Victorian hyper-masculine, homophobic, and misogynist moulds?

Unless we are ready to address this, attempts to use classical aesthetic, philosophical or social models will be dismissed or critiqued for being either "essentialist" or worse, "Hindu nationalist."

Here two points must be made: one, colonialism caused a serious schism between the "westernized" intellectual elite, brought up in Macaulay's mode of being Englishmen in brown skins and the regional language or Sanskrit educated intellectuals who often reacted by closing themselves off from change and began to "preserve" the cultural patrimonies. Even today, few scholars cross these boundaries: Sanskrit scholars are horrified if the old texts are deployed for contemporary culture while many of the "English language" scholars automatically choose to work with western theoretical models.

But when we look at the ways in which colonialism was resisted, we find that a lot of performance and aesthetic traditions were maintained not amongst the educated elite but by living popular performance: simple *rangoli* in a doorway, or ritual paintings in bridal rooms, or narrative and theatrical performances, and songs (rather than "high" poetry). Most scholars approach these from western theoretical frameworks, but imagine the possibilities if we could get a generation of scholars adept in classical texts, as well as the intellectual tools to analyze and rethink these!

As the colonial past fades away, more cultural production is reclaiming these ideas, not by simplistic return to the past but through the recreation of older traditions in new ways. You can see it popular cinema or music in India. It is happening far more slowly in literature due to exigencies of the form itself. I guess I am lucky as I go back and forth between scholarly writing and fiction, because I can think about these issues while also participating in the change.

The reading of your story proposed above does not engage with a postcolonial or post-modern hermeneutic of Indian writing in English. It does not depart from the "Empire writes back" discourse but looks at writing from the point of view of the semantic functionality in both western and Indian traditions, apart from the perspective of power. Do you think there is room for such an approach or is it imperative, because of history, to refer to English writing from South Asia as "postcolonial"?

I wish more scholars were engaging in similar readings, using earlier aesthetic models to understand how Indian writing is evolving. Postcolonial scholars talk of : "hybridity" but often all that means is that western theory is combined with superficial markers of Indianness.

Unfortunately the implicit base for a lot of these "readings' remains Western. For example, there is constant writing about "exile" in diasporic writing from India and other former colonies in Asia and Africa. But "exile" is implicitly constructed in Biblical terms, as a traumatic rupture with a paradise, and constantly coupled with guilt and shame. But what happens if we culturally place the idea of "exile" in India? The greatest "exile" story is the Ramayana, where exile is heroic and not coupled with guilt or shame. How would this change our readings?

Indian Writing in English is especially vulnerable to being considered through the post-colonial lens as it overtly attempts to "write back." But I believe this is a generational issue: for many of my generation, English is no longer a foreign, colonizer's language. It is exactly as Persian was in the 18th century. Just as there is an Indian school of Persian Literature, there will be an Indian school of English Literature, and it will not be about the "Empire writing back" but about telling Indian stories in yet another language.

Finally, while Fanon, Said and others provided useful theoretical models for considering postcolonialism, we need a new set of theories to consider the changes brought by time and shifts in global power balances. Should we not find ways of theorizing how the postcolonial will evolve, especially when the former colonizers lose their status and influence? And yet, few scholars of culture, literature, art are theorizing the impact on culture and cultural production.

Applying models of South Asian culture from western scholarship always carries a risk of essentializing or going along with the political and cultural biases that influenced this discourse. How do you perceive this risk?

There is always a risk, but knowledge of risks is also a good way of managing them. So an awareness of the risks of essentializing or going along with the biased discourses can help create nuanced understanding. What is more problematic is that few scholars are comfortable using Indic theoretical traditions to make sense of Indian cultural production. I believe despite best intentions, this perpetuates "West as Theory, East as Object" formulations. In my ideal world, I would be able to read Faulkner or Hemingway, or Barnes or Morrison using *rasa* theory, with as much scholarly approval as is granted to those who read Premchand or Mahabharata or my work using deconstructionist, psycho-analytical, or feminist theories. Personally, I think in the next few decades, this shall become not only possible but far more popular.

In that sense, your reading is one step in this direction. And for that, I am grateful, not only as a writer – who must necessarily be flattered by such a positive scholarly reaction, but also as a scholar who finds parallels with her own views.

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A Cup Full of Jasmine Oil

Sunny Singh

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They lived next door, Anu-di and Vibha-di. Elder sisters! That's what everyone called them, from the vegetable-seller who brought his push cart full of greens and reds and whites every morning to the students at university who gathered in the evenings on their verandah to drink endless cups of tea and discuss politics and writers with odd sounding names.

Vibha-di always wore crisp saris, starched and ironed to perfection. But Anu-di wore churidar-kameez, looking for all the world like a school-girl with her hair pulled back in two thick plaits. I was fascinated by the *didis*, the sisters. That they lived by themselves, that they seemed to need no one else but each other; that no family ever visited them; that students from the university seemed to inhabit their house and then disappeared into the world beyond. All invitations, for weddings and engagements, births and pregnancies, would be sent to both of them – Anu-di and Vibha-di. There were never any last names on the envelopes.

Often they would stand at the low wall between our houses to talk to my grandmother, sharing I am not quite sure what. After all, they taught at the nearby university, while my grandmother had never even stepped inside a classroom. Even now, when I look back, I wonder what they spoke about, standing on two sides of the low brick wall.

And on bright winter afternoons, they would bask in the sunshine in the *aangan* at the back. I would clamber over the low wall and help them shell bags full of fresh green peas, watching as the mounds of shiny verdure grew mountainous. There was laughter then – even from my usually grim grandmother who sometimes came out to join us – as Anu-di would sing songs and Vibha-di would tell stories, from books, from the university, from days that she had lived in a big city.

Then inevitably Anu-di would begin. "Look at this hair," she would ruffle my short-snipped curls. "*Behenji*, this one has beautiful hair. She must oil it regularly," she would sigh. My grandmother would grin at me, "If you can make her sit still long enough to oil her hair, you can do it. Why do you think it is cut that short? This one was meant to be a boy."

The comment would make all three of them go into paroxysms of laughter, leaving me bewildered and more than slightly annoyed.

"Come *beta*, sit here," Anu-di would insist, drawing me between her knees so my shoulders rested against her legs. "Vibha, get some oil," she would request, her voice suddenly turning soft and husky. "The jasmine one, if you please."

I would want to protest, knowing what was to follow, but something always held me back. There was something compelling in Anu-di's voice, something dangerous in the soft pressure of her fingers on my shoulders. She would tilt up my head, her fingers cool on my chin. Her eyes would laugh down at me for a moment, dark with something strange and mysterious. Powerful. Just enough to make me slump against her legs.

Vibha-di would bring a shiny brass cup, wide and fluted, with viscous glowing oil. Always jasmine. I would shudder as the fragrance floated up to my nostrils. Sweet, heavy, dark. Slightly decayed like something beautiful that had died long ago. Something frightening and secret. "What, you don't like the smell?" Vibha-di would laugh. "When you wear wreathes of it in your hair every night, you will begin to like it." And again the women would burst in to laughter, giggling at some arcane secret that was barred to me.

The first drip of the oil on my crown would make me shiver slightly. Anu-di would just tip the bowl, letting the oil stream down, spreading slowly, stickily through my hair, cool against my scalp. The dreaded scent would wind down to my nose, this time from my own skin. She would begin by tapping the top of my skull with the flat of her hand, like a tabla player preparing for concert. The oil would squelch and slither, muffling the sharp cracks. I would hold my breath, waiting half-anxious, half-excited.

Then Anu-di's hands would begin to move through my hair, gently pressing and massaging the scalp, caressing the oil out to the tips of the curls. Her palms would firmly knead the sides of my head, moving determinedly down my neck in long, even strokes. I would feel drugged, drowsy with the scent of jasmine, with her soft voice humming, the feel of her hands lulling me to oblivion. Slowly her finger tips would massage my temples, moving steadily to the back of my ears. She would caress the whorls of my ear with the tips of her ring finger, ending always with a sharp tug on the lobes.

"Off you go," she would laugh, her voice full of mischief. I would clamber back over the wall, bewildered and uncertain, sure that I hated the scent of jasmine oil, keen to find the next occasion Anu-di would offer to oil my hair. My grandmother would briefly glance at me with sharp, keen eyes, then shoo me off for a bath, as if delaying for another day something she needed to tell me.

I still do not know why those visits over the walls stopped. I do remember that it was just after my twelfth birthday. Vibha-di must have been away, at work or perhaps travelling as she always did in the hot plains summers.

The inside of the house was dark and cool, smelling lightly of *khas* from the mats that covered the windows. It was also, I remember, full of strangely feminine things. Lace and glass, soft colours and frills. All things that would never have survived in our own more practical household, full of rough-and-tumble childish games.

"Come inside, I will get you some *nimbu-paani*," Anu-di told me, when she found me reading half way up the mango tree. The lemonade was too sweet, even for my childish tongue, but it had a lot of ice cubes. I can't remember what we spoke of that day, or indeed if we spoke of anything at all but I have a clear memory of holding my mouth against the cloudy liquid, letting my lip go numb against the cold.

Anu-di had just gotten the bowl of oil for my hair, gleaming green and jewel-like in the golden fluted bowl. She had asked me to sit on the floor before her, pulling me back to lean against her knees.

Then my grandmother arrived, her sari slightly askew and trailing off her head as if she had not paused to put it right, slightly out of breath, with beads of sweat gathered on her brow. "You! Didn't I ask you to stay in the house! Get back home now." The commands to me came fast and harsh, sounding strange on the lips of my usually gentle grandmother.

Bewildered by this sudden rage, I looked up to Anu-di for help. But she wasn't looking at me. Her eyes were on my grandmother, an enigmatic half-smile on her lips. "*Behenji*…" she began.

"No, not today, Anu." My grandmother's rage seemed to be slowly turning inwards, making her eyes glow, her shoulders rigid with some nameless effort. I got slowly to my feet, watching my grandmother and Anu stare at each other, communicating in some strange language that remained unknown to me. I thought there was a plea, sorrow, even a hint of anger on Anu-di's face. "Go. Go, *beta*," she murmured, pushing me gently towards my grandmother.

I walked slowly, trying to make sense of all that remained unspoken in that room. In my grandmother's face there had been suspicion and anger; now there remained an odd sadness and, may be, could it be, embarrassment? She reached out to me as I neared, pulling me close for a brief rare hug. "*Chalo*, lets go."

Nothing more was spoken that day. Or indeed for many more days. Grandmother's command had broken some magical spell, and I didn't go over the wall any more. Anu-di and Vibha-di also seemed to stop coming over to our house. My grandmother insisted on oiling my hair, with coconut oil, once a week. I was too afraid to resist when she called me

Then as the summer bled into winter, grandmother thawed a little. Not enough to begin visiting, but just enough to send over some lemon pickle and fresh jaggery. The *didis* responded too, pausing to talk at the low wall, occasionally waving at me from the verandah. But they never asked me to come over the wall to visit. So there were no more long afternoons of shelling peas and gossip, no more lemonade with masses of ice. No more jasmine scent lingering in my hair and on my pillow even after I had washed the sticky oil out of my hair. It was as if something had been snapped. But what had snapped, no one could tell me.

I saw them recently, the *didis*. At my wedding. They still lived in that old house next door. The house had grown shabby, shrunken with age somehow. They too were much older and greyer, not so glamorous, but perhaps that is the inevitable fate of all our childhood heroes. Vibha-di came to apply *mehndi* on my hands, her sari as crisply starched as ever.

And when I was being dressed for the wedding, Anu-di – still in her girly *churidaar-kameez* – brought a heavy garland of fresh jasmine. She smiled at me, only half-mischievously, in the mirror as she pinned the flowers to my hair. “Now that you are grown up, you’ll know the scent is an aphrodisiac.”

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Pāṣaṇḍin, *vaitaṇḍika*, *vedanindaka* and *nāstika*. On criticism, dissenters and polemics and the South Asian struggle for the semiotic primacy of veridiction*

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Abstract

By reconsidering the epistemic implications underlying the marginal status to which the materials produced by South Asian exponents of various forms of 'dissenting' or 'anti-traditional' intellectual activity have been consigned, in this essay I propose revisiting our understanding of why many South Asian traditions that do not adhere to a dominant doxa have been omitted or given a permanent status of subordination. From this perspective I here argue the paucity of textual materials produced by the 'dissenters' – which now survive only in fragments – is the most striking proof that over the centuries these elements have not been considered as what they really are.

Keywords: Dissent, South Asian intellectual traditions, nāstika, early materialism, pramāṇa

1. Voices of dissent as essential elements in understanding the textual production of 'orthodox' traditions

In a short essay written in 1990, Friedhelm Hardy drew attention to a singular gap in the field of Indological studies. Taking as his example the marginal position to which certain South Asian religious traditions have been consigned, Hardy raised a number of thorny methodological issues. He argued that many of the supposed monolithic 'givens' (for example, the 'true Vedic life') to which we are accustomed are such only by virtue of the history of the discipline. Furthermore, he argued that the part played by 'unorthodox distortions' and 'sectarian developments' has not been attributed sufficient weight, and that their historical role may have been anything but marginal. With his characteristic originality and incisiveness, Hardy outlined a research program:

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* With the technical term 'veridiction' (borrowed from the French *véridiction*, itself a cognate of the medieval Latin term *verdictum* [from *verumdictum* or *veredictum*]) I wish to emphasise the pretension (or the veridic intention) which sustains statements claiming that a certain conviction, or persuasion, is the 'real view' or the 'proper understanding'. This veridic act, a peculiar property of each nomos, is the prerogative of those juridical, religious, and philosophical discourses, in which speakers want to be perceived and acknowledged as 'pronouncing truth'. I have also chosen to use the word veridiction because other English terms — such as truthfulness ('the quality of being truthful'), truthful proposition, truth telling, truth claim (or truthful claim), true statement, or veridic discourse — do not properly express the political, relational, and competitive dimension of this specific form of speech act. Aspects of this latter are not extraneous to the ancient South Asian context. See Thompson 1998. For various usages of the notion of 'veridiction', see Fortier 1997; Landowski 1988; Coquet 1983; Greimas 1980.

In this paper, all the quotations, translations and references to the *Mānavadharmaśāstra* are taken from the critical edition of Patrick Olivelle (Olivelle 2005), whom I would like to thank for having given me the opportunity to consult and use his work before its publication. I am indebted with too many people to mention them all, but would at least like to thank those who directly helped me: Piero Capelli, Alessandro Graheli, Marina Rustow, Francesco Sferra, Gagan Sood.

> Naively it has been assumed that what the dharmashastras lay down as rules corresponds to actual life. In fact, it is no more than an ideal, a blueprint for a perfect society. […] From this follows that a considerable amount of religious life has been going on that is not as such described in the books on the Vedic dharma. No doubt these books, along with the belief in the Vedas etc., played a far wider role as prestigious norms and ideals than such a hypothetical calculation reveals. But they prescribe, not describe. Once it is realized that things need not actually be what they are supposed to be, according to some normative interpretation, it becomes possible to look at them in their own right and not write them off as 'unorthodox distortions' or 'sectarian developments' when acknowledging their existence at all. Thus a vast realm is opened up for the study of a 'Hinduism' after and outside the Veda in senso stricto [sic].[1]

Hardy's reasoning is attractive. Nevertheless, we should try to resist its appeal and consider the problems of his proposal: How can we shift the study of certain social and life environments (Lebenswelten) from the centre to the margins without appearing to make arbitrary choices? How are we to give actual importance to dissenting materials – or what remains of them – and remove them from their classic status of irrelevance? How could these materials contribute to our understanding of a certain historical event or a particular work belonging to a mainstream tradition? By working with the 'unsaid' is there not a danger that we may hear voices that have never actually been spoken?

Indeed, the difficulties of such research programs are numerous.

However, to remove materials produced by dissenting and non-mainstream traditions from their 'statutory' patch of shade need not be an act of mere antiquarianism. On the contrary, it can significantly increase both the quantity of new data, which it is the historian's task to address, and the quality of the reading of all the other data already present. Of course, introducing unaccustomed information into an already existing framework requires the creation of space and the rearrangement of the available elements. In other words, the network of the relations and dynamics of the entire intellectual context under scrutiny has to be redesigned. Re-qualifying and shifting the epistemic status of neglected materials and traditions would lead to at least two results: Although losing the marginal status of being insignificant and peripheral accessory facts, such neglected materials would also acquire the new status – probably corresponding more closely to its reality – of a constitutive part of the formative dialectic of South Asian intellectual production.

In this view, the history and sociology of intellectual traditions can come to our aid.[2] Works in these fields show us how every thought or symbolic system produced by an agent, while the expression of the individual's agency, is also subject to and influenced by the various forms of constraint exercised upon him by the horizon of theoretical possibilities of which he is a part. The elements of these constraints enter into dialectical connection with the agent's cogitatio, which is always socially situated and historically positioned, in the same way as the other conditions which enable its exercise. The effects of such interaction then penetrate the heart of the concepts, notions, and categories which he uses. Hence the imaginative capacity of an agent must always be set in relation to the objective interests deriving from his being situated in a specific position within the social sphere (a place with contours that are always definite and never abstract). The act and the outcome of the intellectual production are therefore closely connected with the social position of the producer and of his interlocutors.

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[1] Hardy 1990: 147. Of course, Hardy is not the only one aware of these problems. Consider also what Witzel said: 'It is often overlooked that the Hindu texts, whether in Sanskrit, Middle or New Indo-āryan, or Dravidian, usually represent the voice of the Brāhmaṇ (the Buddhist, the Jaina, and so forth) establishment. Even originally countermovements (Tantra, for example) made their way into the received texts only after a period of "Brāhmaṇization"— entailing purification and adjustment to the norms of Hinduism' (Witzel 1997b: 501).

[2] Like those at the basis of Collins's work (Collins 2001), which is partly devoted to South Asia. Furthermore, Collins 2002; Bourdieu 1983.

Transferring these principles to dissenting, subaltern, and marginal traditions means that the intellectual production of a majority tradition is not only connected with its social position, but is also greatly influenced by the historical specificity of its epistemic condition. An intellectual production therefore takes shape within a context of relative autonomy, which is the objective outcome of the competitive climate established between the various occupants of the social field, including its dissenting traditions and marginalised subjects. A competitive climate, in which abilities and personal interests, the demands of the professional order or the parent corporation, the need – common to all corporations – to preserve the legitimacy of the existing objective and symbolic heritages, the processes of alliance or rupture which emerge from the interrelations of the various social entities, contribute to, and are responsible for the morphological outcome of the various forms of intellectual production.

Consequently, it is clear how important, if not essential, it is to seek out and listen to the dissenting voices, not merely for *par condicio* issues or out of fascination with minorities. Listening to such voices is, on the contrary, crucial if we are truly seeking to understand the reasons behind the theoretical structures that support the text of a dominant writer or the works of a majority tradition.

2. Tradition, criticism, subalternity: Strategies for establishing the marginality of dissent

Before beginning to think in this way, we must remove some of the structural faults of this method. We have to reconsider the epistemic implications underlying the marginal status to which the materials produced by the exponents of the various forms of 'dissenting' or 'anti-traditional' intellectual activity have been consigned. I am referring, in particular, to our understanding of why many South Asian traditions that do not adhere to a dominant *doxa* have been omitted or given a permanent status of subordination. Here the paucity of textual material produced by the 'dissidents', which now survives only in fragments,[3] is the most striking proof that over the centuries these elements have not been considered as what they really are.

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[3] See Bhattacharya 2002a.

The first phase of this policy of omission and marginalisation is linked to 'traditional' intellectuals (*smārta*), who have excluded these awkward arguments from their treatises, except when driven by the need to contradict dangerously persuasive concepts. Subsequently, the neglect was reinforced by those who shared the historiographic idleness of certain 'traditions' of Indological studies. The force of inertia imposed by the received view has made them wary of inquiring into the strategic and political reasons behind the silence of the sources, and into the literary corpora actually transmitted by 'hegemonic' traditions.

Thus the words of dissent, which the 'orthodox' (*āstika*) authors had strictly consigned to the margins of their cultural universe, acquired a permanent, almost ontological, status of neglect. The traditional desire to shift these intellectual traditions to the sidelines has led, on the one hand, to the conviction that they were indeed marginal and, on the other, to establishing the unified, intact, consistent, and undifferentiated image of the majority tradition. This produced the dominant view – that is, *exempli gratia*, the epistemic foundation of the legitimation of the myth of *sanatānadharma* –[4] according to which the transmission of traditional knowledge has been carried out without interruption or disturbance because it has not been exposed to any real dialectical opposition.

To expose the flaws in this unrealistic argument, we have only to consider the position adopted by certain 'traditional' authors in relation to the specialist tradition that preceded them. This clearly reveals that their degree of concurrence with and deference to the authorities was significantly more limited than the image of non-conflict that tradition would have us believe.

Take, for example, the strength of the opposition and the 'anti-traditional' reasoning of an author such as Kauṭilya.[5] The same can be said of other fields and genres in which dialectic, innovation, and the assertion of specificity or subjectivity have played a decisive role in the establishment of a tradition.[6]

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[4] Note, in fact, that the famous theme of *sanātanadharma* enters Sanskrit juridical discourse from the *Mānavadharmaśāstra*. See *Mānavadharmaśāstra*, 4.138 (*dharmaḥ sanātanaḥ*); 7.98 (*dharmaḥ sanātanaḥ*); 9.64 (*dharmaḥ hanyuḥ sanātanam*). The fact that it is not present in the previous *dharmasūtra*s indicates in part that new historical and political conditions nourish the author's intentions. For other references to the condition of eternity of the norm and other related themes, see *Mānavadharmaśāstra*, 9.325; 10.7; 12.99. Another coeval work in which the theme of the *sanātanadharma* appears several times is the *Mahābhārata*. Further, for some considerations about modern revisiting of the notion of *sanātanadharma*, see Zavos 2001; Kaviraj 1999: 38–39; Halbfass 1990: 322; 341–346. Moreover, Goldman 1997; Heesterman 1985: 2.

[5] The formula 'Kauṭilya does not [say] so' (*na iti kauṭilyaḥ*) – expressing an apparent distance and opposition from the opinions of other people (opinions that are mostly attributed by the author to prominent personalities [*ācārya*] or, less frequently, to specific authorities [Manu, Uśana, Bṛhaspati etc.], or to previous teachings [*iti upadiśanti*]) – is very frequently used in the work of Kauṭilya and it marks the argumentative and dialectical nature of its discourse. This formula is recurrently used within portions of the *Arthaśāstra* (*exempli gratia*, *Arthaśāstra*, 7.9.1–51; 7.12.1–25; 8.2.1–26; 8.3.1–61; 8.4.1–47; 9.1.1–34) dedicated to themes which, from a political point of view, are extremely important. See, for the occurrence of this formula in detail, *Arthaśāstra*, 1.4.7; 1.15.32; 3.11.47; 3.14.7; 3.19.20; 3.20.5; 7.4.9; 7.5.4; 7.5.13; 7.9.10; 7.9.15; 7.9.20; 7.9.24; 7.9.28; 7.9.33; 7.9.51; 7.10.13; 7.11.14; 7.12.10; 7.12.15; 7.12.19; 7.12.23; 7.13.32; 7.15.16; 7.17.4; 8.1.12; 8.1.22; 8.1.28; 8.1.37; 8.1.46; 8.1.55; 8.2.6; 8.2.10; 8.2.14; 8.2.22; 8.3.13; 8.3.27; 8.3.34; 8.3.42; 8.3.52; 8.3.58; 8.4.3; 8.4.6; 8.4.10; 8.4.14; 8.4.17; 8.4.22; 8.4.25; 8.4.28; 8.4.32; 8.4.35; 8.4.39; 8.4.42; 9.1.6; 9.1.13; 9.1.32; 9.2.22; 12.1.6. Kauṭilya also employs a more neutral way – but not less assertive – way of reinforcing his statements and judgements, using the formula 'Kauṭilya [says] so' (*iti kauṭilyaḥ*). See *Arthaśāstra*, 1.2.8; 1.7.6; 1.8.27; 1.10.17; 1.15.50; 1.17.22; 1.17.30; 2.7.15; 2.9.12; 3.4.12; 3.4.36; 3.5.24; 3.7.3; 3.17.5; 3.17.14; 3.19.18; 5.6.23; 5.6.32; 7.1.5; 7.6.31; 7.11.38;

And if this was the case within an individual tradition, we can imagine what took place outside it, where the coercive influence of group interests and bonds of belonging was less relevant.

Removing such structural flaws from our method, however, requires that we distance ourselves from a whole series of stereotyped forms, foremost among which is that which Olivelle has neatly defined as '[...] the marvellous illusion of *sanātanadharma* and changeless India'.[7] Fortunately, today we are in a position to review this state of affairs, thanks to the efforts of various researchers and the recent introduction of new approaches to the understanding of the process of intellectual history and the relationships between the different fields of cultural production, even in the sphere of South Asian antiquity.

Once the reasons for the oblivion to which the dissenting traditions have been consigned are understood, we can then attempt to redesign the structure, the systemic typologies, and the dynamics of intellectual production and transmission in South Asian, thus redeeming from an artificial status of marginality an agonistic aspect of cultural production which intrinsically is in no way marginal at all.

3. The struggle between 'traditions' for the semiotic primacy of veridiction

My basic assumption is that the monopoly on veridiction, which all traditions claim to possess, is always achieved through the imposition of principles of epistemic vision and social division. This monopoly accords a privileged status and can only be achieved by a tradition after passing over, assimilating, defeating, or even concealing the logical and historical legitimacy of its opponents and competitors. However, even if we accept the rationale of the model of semiotic conflict, to speak of 'traditions against *the* tradition' is only possible in effect when we can show the existence, at historical level, of a set of agents that actually hold, or claim to hold, a monopoly on veridiction. To substantiate this necessary condition, we must analyse the tradition's representations of itself, its claims to truth, and its pretensions to primacy. In other words, we have to gather evidence of the operation of concrete corporative forms that have benefited from the outcome achieved by an initial policy of knowledge governed by a desire for cultural supremacy.

7.15.11; 9.1.43; 13.4.5; 15.1.22. Here we are clearly dealing with an intellectual practice which implies the critique of previous authorities and that, for obvious reasons, gained popularity, up to the point that Kauṭilya's statements themselves have become the objects of further criticism. See, *exempli gratia*, Zimmermann 2000: 186–199.

[6] This is clear if we consider the case of the authors of juridical texts: 'They gave their texts a particular structure; they argued for particular positions in law and morality; they disagreed with other experts, both their contemporaries and their predecessors; and they had particular social, economic and political axes to grind. In all this they are not much different from modern authors' (Olivelle 2002: 536–537). For a theoretical proposal concerning the authorial condition in classical South Asian textual materials, see Squarcini 2004.

[7] Olivelle 1993: 246.

Fortunately, regarding the status of the Gangetic area in the centuries prior to our period, the existence and the scope of such a necessary condition has recently been corroborated by several studies.[8] Consequently, it is now historically plausible to speak of the existence of a wide-ranging cultural project that attempted to establish, canonise, and regulate specific practices, cults, beliefs, visions, customs, institutions, and values.

If this is true, then we have satisfied the basic conditions and arguments that allow us to assume the existence of dialectic and dispute between the various bearers of different truths. Among these, those who prevailed then sought to subordinate, minimise, obstruct, and disregard[9] the semiotic and cultural heritage of the others.

From these premises, we can begin to collect and then review what remains of such conflict, seeking to understand how and to what extent the different parties were dialectically involved in the internal struggles within the South Asian intellectual domain of their time.

And so we come to the 'traditions against *the* tradition' issue, which should thus be understood as a model in which different knowledge-producing and knowledge-spreading agencies, immersed within a pluralistic climate of semiotic and political strife, competed against each other for the monopoly on veridiction and sought the objective establishment of their own forms of knowledge about the world.

This model becomes even more plausible if, as Ramkrishna Bhattacharya has argued, in classical times words such as *lokāyata* referred to a sort of *disputatio*.[10] Giving central importance to the practice of dialectics and dispute between different points of view appears now anything but out of place. On the contrary, this perspective allows us to re-examine a whole series of significant South Asian cultural phenomena, such as the strongly agonistic spirit of some Vedic poets[11] or the structure of certain dialectical practices (such as *vikalpa*, *apoha*, *vivāda*, etc.). These practices were widely used and therefore achieved high levels of practical, theoretical, and lexical formalisation.[12] Thus, as Kaviraj has recently pointed out, we must attribute considerable importance to the fact that

> [t]he intellectual universe of Sanskrit possessed a culture of energetic, intense and vivid

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[8] See, *exempli gratia*, Wezler 2004: 643–646 (where the processes of 'vedification' and 'brahmanisation' are discussed); Witzel 1997a; Witzel 1997c: 266–268; 293–296; 301–303; 307–313; Witzel 1995; Deshpande 1999; Pollock 2005a; Pollock 2005b; Pollock 1990.

[9] See Piantelli 1996: 50; 53.

[10] See Bhattacharya 1998a; Bhattacharya 2000b. The word *lokāyata* is attested since Pātañjali (*Mahābhāṣya*, 7.3.45) and *Arthaśāstra* (Bhattacharya 1998b), but from the sixth century CE was largely used by epitomists, polemists, and doxographers to indicate 'materialist' philosophy. See Bhattacharya 2002b. Further, on the denigratory depictions of *lokāyata* and *cārvāka* by the ninth-century author Jayantabhaṭṭa, see Bhattacharya 2002c.

[11] Emblematic is the poetic dispute (*vījina*) within the college of Vedic poets, where the revelation of the 'connections' (*bandhu*) was comprised within a context of serious objective interests. See, *exempli gratia*, *Ṛgveda*, 10.35.1–14; 10.71.1–11 (on poetic agonism); 10.81.1–7; 10.166.1–5 (on the victory against the colleagues). Further, Oguibénine 1998: 158–159; Gonda 1984: 1–67; Gonda 1975: 79–82; Durante 1976: 194–201.

[12] See, on the practices connected to the dialectical debate and its various implications, Matilal 1998: 31–87; Solomon 1976–78; Stcherbatsky 2000: 457–505.

> critical discussion, a culture that revelled in controversy; and precisely because it considered disputation so important in the search for truth, it devoted great attention to devising rules for rational prosecution of intellectual debates.[13]

If, however, we want to discover the factors that enable the development of these intellectual practices, we should not confine ourselves to the speculative and rational aspects of cultural production, thereby risking a banal accounting for everything by recourse to the 'Indians' love for specialised technicism', but should rather look at the semiotic-political need to define reality. Indeed, if we look deeply into the social and economic conditions of ancient South Asia, we can find evidence to conclude that the development, justification, institution, and diffusion of such intellectual products could not come about merely for reasons of enjoyment. These practices, extremely demanding and complex, were necessarily stimulated and sustained by both logical and political causes.

A very good example[14] is found in one of the seven treatises of the Buddhist *Abhidhammapiṭaka*. This work, eloquently entitled *Kathāvatthu*[15] – probably written during the reign of Aśoka,[16] and hence in a situation characterised by marked political and ideological tensions – is entirely devoted to a guided exposition of dialectical practice. That subsequent Buddhist authors felt the need to ascribe the structure of the *Kathāvatthu* to Buddha himself only confirms the importance they attributed to the proper conduct of a dispute.[17] Buddha thus plays the role of guarantor and custodian of the principles of argumentative dialectics which must be observed during the search for the semiotic primacy of veridiction. As recently stated by Jonardon Ganeri,

> The *Kathāvatthu* or *Points of Controversy* is a book about method. It describes, for the benefit of adherents to various Buddhist schisms, the proper method to be followed in conducting a critical discussion into an issue of doctrinal conflict.[18]

Nothing shows the strategies behind the intellectual vitality of South Asia in the centuries previous to our era better than this interweaving of veridical discourse, methods of dispute, doctrinal politics, and ideological interests.[19] It is the inherent vitality of a context in which the agonistic procedures of dispute and opposition between different conflicting forms of veridiction were granted that confers the power to define the arrangement of the social space occupied by the exponents of different points of view.

[13] Kaviraj 2005: 125.

[14] Within Buddhism the four *mahopadesa*s constitute a very important antecedent, indeed. See Yang Gyu An 2003; Davids 1977.

[15] See *Kathāvatthu* (Taylor 1894; 1897).

[16] See Barua 1937: 367–370.

[17] See Buddhaghosa, *Atthasālinī* (in PTS, p. 8).

[18] Ganeri 2001: 485.

[19] There is no doubt that these conditions are not exclusive to this period. *In primis*, we can also refer to the important work of Vasubandhu (c. 360 CE), named *Vādavidhi*. For the edition and translation of its remaining fragments, see Frauwallner 1957; Tucci 1928. Further, Rangaswami Iyengar 1953. The work that Dharmakīrti dedicated to the logic of the debate is another significant indicator of the activities of such a spirit. See Dharmakīrti, *Vādanyāya* (Gokhale 1993).

It is here that the urgency for the recovery of the agonistic context in which, since the Vedic era,[20] the practices of intellectual production have taken place, merge with the need to imagine and then identify the actual profiles of the opponents, which are not recorded in detail in the accounts and productions of the traditions that attained primacy.

In this regard, the exploration of the way in which the sources connect the relation between description of the argumentative dialectic and prescription of the moral judgement is revealing. The more strictly theoretical treatises technically codified the dialectic method in line with precise forms and roles – later codified in terms of various forms of debate (*vāda*, *jalpa*, *vitaṇḍā*, etc.).[21] Elsewhere, attempts to usefully employ the semiotic power derived from the success achieved in the dialectic conflict task the form of questioning the adversary's moral status, seeking to support the theoretical dimension with the strength of practical considerations. It is no coincidence that the moralisation of differences and opposing positions has always been the preferred approach of those who promoted specific symbolic and ethical construction of social reality, strongly marked by hegemonic claims.[22]

This is why Brahmanic sources describe their intellectual adversaries in disparaging terms, promoting a negative picture of their values and moral qualities. They are divided into 'opponents' (*vipratipakṣin*, *prativādin*, *pūrvapakṣin*), 'skeptics' and 'dialecticians' (*tārkika*, *hetumat*, *hetuvādin*), and 'disputants' (*vivādātmaka*), but they are also presented as 'bearers of false visions' (*mithyādṛṣṭin*), 'polemicists' (*vaitaṇḍika*), 'deniers' (*nāstika*), and 'materialists' (*bhūtavādin*).

Some of these epithets are morally charged signs of real disputes, whose real protagonists are opposing social agents – although their morphology is often obscured in the texts. They act dialectically within a specific domain, are driven by conflicting interests, and are seriously involved in the contest for the primacy of veridiction. It is clear that they do not debate simply out of *vis polemica*. Some dissenters, for example, are perfectly aware that demolishing a given belief, or an axiomatic system, provokes an epistemic rupture that, in turn, generates other epistemic breaks destabilising the entire system of representation. In other words, when a 'denier' (*nāstika*) claims that one must attribute primacy and 'priority' (*jyeṣṭhatā*) only to 'sense perception' (*pratyakṣa*), he asserts that the scriptures (*āgama*) are not a valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*).[23] By saying so he induces others to think that what the auctoritates declare about other aspects of real life is also unfounded. Such a polemic attitude, if not disproved, risks becoming a more general 'doctrine of the negation of the Veda as a valid means' (*vedaprāmāṇyaniṣedhavāda*).[24] This is the type of threat most feared by 'orthodox' (*āstika*) traditions,[25] such as that championed by the author of the *Mānavadharmaśāstra*. In this regard, the arguments used to stigmatise the critical approach mentioned above are emblematic:

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[20] I'm referring to the existence of 'deniers of gods' in the *Ṛgveda* (*exempli gratia*, *Ṛgveda*, 2.25.5; 8.100.3–4 [where the god Indra is denied]) and to those who deny the 'divine' status of the Veda. See Ronzitti 2001. Another example of this attitude is Kautsa's words cited in Yaska, *Nirukta*, 1.15–16. Further, but related to a different period, Slaje 1998.

[21] These notions are among the constitutive elements of the epistemological structure of the initial *nyāya* knowledge system. See Gautama, *Nyāyasūtra*, 1.2.1–20; 1.1.32–41.

[22] See Bourdieu 1991: 5–13.

[23] This in brief is what is said in one of the oldest remaining fragments of the 'materialist' philosophy — included within the conversation on the liberation of Janaka, king of Mithila (*Mahābhārata*, 12.211.1–48) — where the lack of real evidence of the existence of an entity separate from the body is discussed as a sound reason not to believe in the authority of the 'scripture' (*āgama*). See *Mahābhārata*, 12.211.21–45 (in part. 12.211.26–27: *pratyakṣaṃ hy etayor mūlaṃ kṛtānta iti hy ayor api | pratyakṣo hy āgamo 'bhinnaḥ kṛtānto vā na kiṃcana || yatra tatrānumāne 'sti kṛtam bhāvayate'pi vā | anyo jīvaḥ śarīrasya nāstikānāṃ*

> 10. 'Scripture' should be recognized as 'Veda', and 'tradition' as 'Law Treatise' [*dharmaśāstra*]. These two should never be called into question in any matter, for it is from them that the Law has shined forth. 11. If a twice-born disparages these two by relying on the science of logic, he ought to be ostracized by good people as an infidel [*nāstika*] and a denigrator of the Veda [*vedanindaka*].[26]

In the wake of these threats, other exponents of the 'orthodox' tradition later declared that the primary intention of logical reasoning (*nyāya*) was to 'protect the validity of the Veda' (*vedaprāmāṇyarakṣā*).[27] It is evident that this is not just a struggle for knowledge but also – or perhaps mainly – a struggle for symbolic power and primacy of veridiction. The object of such a dispute to win the right to speak, which consists of the right to legitimately formulate propositions. These propositions, owing to the link between the performative force of the speech-acts and the political interest in establishing certain sets of meanings, have the power to give knowledge reality.

The irenic image of the struggle for knowledge could still make some sense in relation to intellectual practices such as 'philosophical scepticism',[28] even if it would be reductive to see them as devoid of non-theoretical interest, since – extending Randall Collins's explanatory model to this sphere –[29] these too can no longer be represented as mere philosophical approaches. But this argument loses strength in the face of more 'committed' forms of dissent.

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mate smṛtaḥ || [Critical ed.]). The *śloka* following this one is ascribed to the *nāstika* in the commentary of Nīlakaṇṭha.

[24] We have evidence of this attitude cited by its detractors. The following aphorisms ascribed to the *cārvāka* or *lokāyata* are indicative of such a position: 'let the rites of *dharma* not be practised' (*na dharmāṃś caret*) in Vātsyāyana, *Kāmasūtra*, 1.2.21–24 (21. *na dharmāṃś caret. eṣyat phalatvāt. saṃśayikatvāc ca* | 22. *ko hy abāliśo hastagataṃ paragataṃ kuryāt* | 23. *varam adya kapotaḥ śvo mayūrāt* | 24. *varaṃ sāṃśayikān niṣkād asāṃśayikaḥ kārṣāpaṇaḥ* | *iti laukāyatikāḥ* |); 'let *dharma* not be done' (*dharmo na kāryaḥ*) and 'let its instructions not be considered trustworthy' (tad *upadeśeṣu na pratyetavyam*) in Jayantabhaṭṭa, *Nyāyamañjarī*, *āhnika* 4 (ed. Varadacharya 1969: 647–648).

[25] One of the traditional etymologies of the term — based on Pāṇini, *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, 4.4.60 (*astināstidiṣṭam matiḥ*) — says 'he whose opinion is that *īśvara* exists' (*asti īśvara iti matir yasya*). Other definitions include 'opposite of *nāstika*' (*nāstika bhinna*); 'he whose idea is that *īśvara* exists' (*īśvara asti iti vādī*); 'he who considers the Vedas as authorities' (*vedaprāmāṇyavādī*). Further, according to Hemacandra, *āstika* is a synonym for 'he who believes' (*śraddhālu*) and for *śraddhā*. See Rājārādhākānta 1961: s.v.

[26] *Mānavadharmaśāstra*, 2.10–11. Further, on these 'offenders of the Veda' (*vedanindaka*), *Mānavadharmaśāstra*, 2.11; 3.161; 4.163; 11.57.

[27] See Jayantabhaṭṭa, *Nyāyamañjarī*, *āhnika* 1 ([p. 7] *nyāyavistaras tu mūlastambhabhūtaḥ sarvavidyānāṃ vedaprāmāṇyarakṣāhetutvāt* |); *āhnika* 1 ([p. 11] *yasya hi vedaprāmāṇye saṃśayānā viparyastā vā matiḥ, taṃprati śāstrārambhaḥ* |) (ed. Varadacharya 1969).

[28] New contributions have recently been made to the analysis of the role played by Scepticism and by systematic doubt within South Asian intellectual traditions. See Bhattacharya 2000a; Butzenberger 1996; Franco 1994; Bhattacharyya 1987; Matilal 1985; Franco 1984; Franco 1983; Gupta 1981.

[29] See Collins 2002; Collins 2001: 177–271.

The ‘materialistic’ discourse connected with the figure of Bṛhaspati, for example, was not just a sort of intellectual and doctrinal distancing from a given point of view, but rather a clear ethical and moral rejection, by which certain individuals reacted to a given social condition. It is fairly evident that certain dissenters voiced their criticisms against cultural orders that they considered oppressive and as harbouring hegemonic pretensions. Their main objective was to reveal the unsoundness of the theoretical basis of certain ethical-regulatory structures. This is what can be gathered from the intentions of certain ancient theoreticians at the forefront of ‘materialist’ traditions, such as Bṛhaspati.[30] Indeed,

> Bṛhaspati’s assertion that inference is not a means of valid cognition had a pragmatic purpose: to cut off any divine or supernatural factor from the foundation of social and ethical theories.[31]

A similar critical approach can be found in the specialised domain of the Buddhist *pramāṇa* tradition, which exhibits a similarly sceptical and polemical stance toward the Brahmanic social vision.[32]

If the dispute among different traditions over the monopoly on veridiction had lacked non-theoretical foundations, South Asia would never have experienced the extraordinary intellectual ferment of its writers, who took part in lengthy and heated debates with clear monopolistic intentions. A good example of this tension is the secular dispute on the criteria to be adopted for discerning the validity of the ‘means of knowledge’ (*pramāṇa*). What developed into the ‘discourse on reliable warrants’ (*pramāṇavāda*) was at the centre of a heated debate that lasted for centuries. Through the production of several specialised works, originating from the most diverse ideological and religious convictions, the criteria for establishing the authority of the sources of knowledge were subjected to meticulous scrutiny.

Consider, for example, the long-standing debate – which generated an immense literary production – that can be traced to the idea of *pramāṇa* presented in the work of Bhartṛhari (450–510 CE) and extends through the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* of Dignāga (480–540 CE), to the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* and the *Pramāṇavārttika* of Dharmakīrti (600–660 CE) – an important text which has given rise to numerous commentaries –[33] to the *Pramāṇalakṣaṇa* of Sarvajṇātman (c. 1027 CE), the *Pramāṇāntarbhavaprakaraṇa* of Ratnakīrti (c. 1070 CE), the *pramāṇanayatattvālokālaṃkara* of Vādi Devasūri (1087–1150 CE), the *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā* of Hemacandra (1089–1172 CE), the *Pramāṇamañjarī* of Sarvadeva (c. 1200 CE), the *Pramāṇalakṣaṇa* of Madhvācārya (1238–1317 CE), the *Pramāṇapaddhati* of the famous *dvaitavedāntaṭīkākāra* Jayatīrtha (1335–1385 CE), the *Pramāṇasundara* of Padmasundara (c. 1550 CE), the *Pramāṇapramoda* and the *Prāmāṇyavāda* of Harirāma Tarkavāgīśa (c. 1640 CE), and the later *Prameyaratnāvalī* of Baladevavidyābhūṣaṇa (c. 1780 CE).

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[30] See Namai 1976.

[31] Franco 1983: 148. Further, Franco 1994: 8; 46–47; Bhattacharya 1997.

[32] See Eltschinger 2000: 33–60; 83–86.

[33] Such as the *Pramāṇavārttikaṭīkā* of Śākyamati (c. 710 CE), the *Pramāṇavārttikaṭīkā* of Śaṃkarananda (c. 800 CE), the *pramāṇavārttikaṭīkā* of Jina (c. 920 CE), the *vṛtti* of Manorathanandin (c. 950 CE), or the *Pramāṇavārttikālaṃkāra* of Prajṇākaragupta (c. 750–810 CE).

This is to mention only a fragment of the vast number of treatises and texts – a list of which would take up many pages – produced in the attempt to ground and legitimise distinct theoretical constructs through the priority granted to certain sets of *pramāṇa*.[34]

But behind the technicism of the 'discourse on reliable warrants' (*pramāṇavāda*) hides the much more thorny question of authority, which inevitably brings into play issues of the sociology of knowledge. This has been clear since the origin of the notion of *pramāṇa*. Recently investigating one of the first occurrences of the term, Wezler defined *pramāṇa* as 'authority as the relevant instance' (Wezler 2004: 638). And it is precisely this placing of the notion of *pramāṇa* in close relation to the problem of authority which brings to the fore the agonistic climate underlying the debate on the definition of *pramāṇa*s. It is therefore, for all interests and purposes, a dispute on veridiction, which clearly exemplifies the difficulties faced by anyone wishing to elevate his own criteria to *super partes* principles. This became evident with the influence on the discussion on the *pramāṇa*s assumed by Buddhist authors such as Dharmakīrti or Dignāga, who introduced the notion of 'one who is (like) a *pramāṇa*' (*pramāṇabhūtapuruṣa*), so as to invest particular persons with full veridical authority, leaving them the last word regarding the correctness of modes of knowing.[35] Such interested agonistic usage of the notion clearly shows how contemporary research into the types and history of *pramāṇa* must now avail itself of interpretative models borrowed from the sociology of knowledge, unless we wish to keep repeating the situation where "[i]t is not absolutely clear what theories of *pramāṇa* were meant for" (Oetke 2003: 199).

All this confirms the fact that every *forma mentis* exists, and can be experienced, starting from a tangible, objective, and incarnate *modus vivendi*. This is the concrete dimension that gives strength to the abstract. And it is precisely because of such osmosis that intellectual postures and positions within the social sphere need to be seen as closely connected.

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[34] To explore the main contexts in which the *pramāṇavāda* developed, see Balcerowicz 2005; Phuntsho 2005; Kataoka 2003; Kellner 2003; Oetke 2003; Colas-Chauhan 2002; Arnold 2001; Krasser 2001; Houben 2001; Houben 1999; Gokhale 1993; Taber 1992; Potter 1992; Dreyfus 1991; Sarma 1989–1990; Aklujkar 1989a; Aklujkar 1989b; Hegde 1982; Bandyopadhyay 1979; Bhattacharya 1977.

[35] See Silk 2002; Krasser 2001; Franco 1997: 15–43; Seyfort Ruegg 1995; Seyfort Ruegg 1994; Tillemans 1993.

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He addressed the Kayānian king: “I am a prophet!” – The Image of Zoroaster in the *Dāstān-e Goshtāsp* (Tale of Goshtāsp)

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the image of the ancient Iranian prophet Zoroaster in the *Shāhnāma* based on a closed reading of the story about the Kayānian king Goshtāsp written by Daqiqi (and continued by Ferdousi). There has so far been no comprehensive treatment of Daqiqi’s rendering of Zoroaster and the founding of the first Zoroastrian community. This lack of scholarly research is surprising given the importance of Daqiqi in the transmission of the ancient Iranian cultural and religious heritage (illustrated in his pioneering role in the creation of the *Shāhnāma* of Ferdousi) and the uniqueness of his work, which constitutes the only long poem that has been preserved from the Sāmānid and pre-Sāmānid period (even though extant verses of some early poets suggest the existence of several other epic works). As Daqiqi relates, it was in Goshtāsp’s reign that Zoroaster introduced his religion in the Iranian cultural sphere, with the support of the king’s son Esfandiār. Goshtāsp was forced to go to war to defend the faith against king Arjāsp of Turān and suffered the loss of his brother Zarēr in battle. These are celebrated events in the early history of Zoroastrianism that have been expounded upon throughout the centuries in different versions.

Keywords: Abu Manṣur Daqiqi, *Shāhnāma*, Abo’l-Qāsem Ferdousi, Zoroaster, Ahura Mazdā, Sāmānid, Avestā, Goshtāsp

Introduction

The *Shāhnāma* (Book of Kings) of Abo’l-Qāsem Ferdousi (940–1020) is generally considered the Persian national epic *par excellence* and enjoys an iconic status in Iranian literary culture. In medieval times it played a decisive role in the renaissance of the Persian language across the Iranian cultural sphere and had an enduring influence on the flourishing of Persian literature and art. Although other poets and scholars, such as Ḥanżala Bādghisi, Rudaki, and Shahid Balkhi, not to mention Abu Manṣur Daqiqi, contributed to the genesis and growth of the Persian cultural renaissance, Ferdousi alone must be credited with its success and triumph. The major reason for his iconic status and uniqueness in relation to his contemporaries is the magnitude of his work as well as the nature of its subject matter. His greatness is even more impressive given that he lacked royal patronage and encouragement. The *Shāhnāma* was not a unique phenomenon, and its authors – Daqiqi succeeded by Ferdousi – drew on an extant oral and written tradition, albeit for the most part in prose, which had utilized more ancient Sāsānian materials.[1] Thanks to their dedication and genius not only did the Persian language and Iranian traditional history survive the persistent assaults of Arab cultural domination, but the mythology, customs, beliefs, and mores of ancient Iran were revived and preserved for posterity.[2]

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[1] The indirect influence of oral transmission on the genesis and evolution of the Persian written epic tradition has been discussed by Kumiko Yamamoto (2003) and Mahmoud Hassanabadi (2010).

The aim of this article is to examine the image of the ancient Iranian prophet Zoroaster[3] in the *Shāhnāma* based on a closed reading of the story about the Kayānian king Goshtāsp written by Daqiqi (and continued by Ferdousi). In his pioneering study of Zoroastrian influences on Persian literature the Iranian scholar Moḥammad Moʿin (1948:315–365) devoted a chapter to Daqiqi's epic with specific emphasis on its Zoroastrian themes. He presented a wide range of primary data collected from a variety of Persian sources but made no attempt at a historical-critical analysis beyond the descriptive level. Apart from Moʿin's monograph, previous research on Daqiqi's epic has been restricted to comparative examinations of Middle Persian works in the same genre (Geiger 1890, Utas 2008:1–20); historical and literary analyses of heroic themes (Davidson 1994:146–155, Davis 1992:128–160); and assessments of its role in Iranian national history (Christensen 1931:117–126, Yarshater 1983:465–470). There has so far been no comprehensive treatment of Daqiqi's rendering of Zoroaster and the founding of the first Zoroastrian community. This lack of scholarly research is unexpected given the importance of Daqiqi in the transmission of the ancient Iranian cultural and religious heritage (illustrated in his pioneering role in the creation of the *Shāhnāma*) and the uniqueness of his work, which constitutes the only long poem that has been preserved from the Sāmānid and pre-Sāmānid period (even though extant verses of some early poets suggest the existence of several other epic works).

As Daqiqi relates, it was in Goshtāsp's reign that Zoroaster introduced his religion in the Iranian cultural sphere, with the support of the king's son Esfandiār the Brazen-bodied (*Ruintan*). Goshtāsp was forced to go to war to defend the faith against king Arjāsp of Turān and suffered the loss of his brother Zarēr in battle. These are celebrated events in the early history of Zoroastrianism that have been expounded upon throughout the centuries in different versions. The narrative framework of Daqiqi's account coincides with that of the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān* (Memorial of Zarēr Family), a Middle Persian fragment of epic verse originally composed in Parthian in north-eastern Iran and slightly transformed in the middle Sāsānian period.[4] Although the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān* is the only surviving specimen of ancient Iranian epic in Middle Persian, its thematic origin, according to Benveniste (1932) dates back to the Achaemenid period as testified by a romantic legend preserved in the *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus on the authority of Charas of Mitylene.[5] The fact that Daqiqi's account is more archaic and more elaborate than the Pahlavi text, as far as its themes are concerned, indicates that there existed multiple versions of the story and that Daqiqi most likely had access to other oral or written sources, perhaps going back to an Avestān original that is no longer extant.[6] The present study is not however concerned with a comparative analysis of Daqiqi's account and the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān*, as it is likely that Daqiqi mainly consulted the *Shāhnāma-ye Abu Manṣuri*, a Persian rendition of the *Kh^{v}aδāy-nāmag* (Book of Kings), a compendium of legendary and historical traditions compiled at the end of the Sāsānian period (*c.* 620).

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[2] The phenomenon of the Persian cultural renaissance was explored at the conference "The Rise of the Persian Renaissance" held at the University of Oxford in July 2008.

[3] In the *Shāhnāma* Zoroaster's name is varyingly spelt Zardosht or Zardhosht, but I use the Greek form here since it is more familiar to Western readers. The Gāthic form of the name is Zaraθuštra.

[4] It is generally supposed that its Parthian origin is confirmed by the many Parthian words, phrases, and grammatical patterns throughout the text, but Utas (2008:19) has convincingly argued that the text lacks clearly Parthian elements alien to ordinary Pahlavi.

[5] For a discussion on the continuity of the narrative traditions as attested in the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān* and in the *Shāhnāma*, see Boyce 1955.

Daqiqi's life and work

Abu Manṣur Daqiqi is celebrated as one of the most important figures in early Persian literature but datable events of his life are very scanty. According to Moḥammad ʿAufi's (d. 1242) *Lubāb al-albāb* (Quintessence of Hearts) his personal name was Moḥammad ibn Aḥmad and his patronymic Abu Manṣur.[7] Daqiqi was a native of Khorāsān, probably born in Ṭus or Balkh, although Samarkand is also mentioned as his birthplace in later biographical works such as the *Ātashkade-ye Āẕar* (Fire-temple of Āẕar) of Loṭfʿali Bigdeli Āẕar (d. 1780) and the *Majmaʿʾol-Foṣaḥāʾ* (Meeting Place of the Eloquent) of the Qājār writer Reẓā Qoli Khān Hedāyat (d. 1871).[8] Daqiqi's social background is not known but one of his lyrical poems refers to its author as a noble (*āzāda-zād*), which attests to an aristocratic ancestry (D 142). Similar to a large number of Iranian dignitaries and learned individuals of the early medieval period he probably belonged to the provincial landed gentry (*dehqānān*) or was descended from this class. The *dehqān*s clung to national customs and traditions more than any other class and were favoured by the ruling Sāmānid dynasty, which attempted to revive Sāsānian culture. His social milieu and class consciousness did in this case have a decisive impact on the national spirit of his work since the *dehqān*s played a significant role in the transmission of the heroic as well as romantic epics of ancient Iran.[9]

To judge from his preserved literary production, Daqiqi entered service as a court poet in his youth at the Sāmānid court of Manṣur I, son of Nuḥ (r. 961–976), in Bukhara. A career as a court poet being the obvious choice in his period for someone with literary talent, he wrote panegyrics praising this king and other Sāmānid princes. The fragments of a *qaṣida* in praise of Manṣur I include a declaration of the king's divine legitimacy and a comparison of his glory to that of the Achaemenids (*āl-e dārā*) (D 159). Daqiqi soon earned success at the court and won distinction for his panegyrics and mastery of various lyrical forms. As ʿAufi (1903 II: 11) explains, he took the pen-name Daqiqi after having been recognized for his “perfectionism in meaning” (*deqqat-e maʿāni*) and “stylistic tenderness” (*reqqat-e alfāz*). In Bukhara he probably made the acquaintance of many princes and men of letters and learning, one of the most notable being the Sāmānid historian and vizier Abu ʿAli Moḥammad Balʿami. Later he also served as a court poet under Manṣur I’s son and successor Nuḥ II (r. 976–997), who is praised in a *qaṣida* that contains traditional panegyric images in a rudimentary form. In between the above mentioned Sāmānid patrons, he also tried his fortune at the court of the Chaghānid (Āl-e Moḥtāj) dynasty north of Termez̲. Daqiqi is highly celebrated by later authors for his affluent panegyrics in praise of the Chaghānid king Fakhrod-Doula Abu Możaffar, patron of the poets Monjik and Farrokhi Sistāni. He also wrote panegyrics and elegiac poems to other Chaghānid princes, such as Abu Saʿd Mużaffar and Abu Naṣr Aḥmad.

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[6] Evidence from the *Shāhnāma* indicates that Daqiqi consulted the *Dēnkard*, the largest extant Middle Persian work, which consists of a compilation of the millennial Zoroastrian tradition. Chapter seven of the *Dēnkard* describes Zoroaster's revelation and the conversion of the Kayānian king Goshtāsp, which is followed by a description of the war between Goshtāsp and the Turānian king Arjāsp. According to Nyberg (1975:517) this account forms the "pre-history" of certain episodes in the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān*.

[7] Cf. Aufi 1903 II:11.

[8] Cf. Hedāyat I:214. Although Daqiqi is generally referred to as Daqiqi-ye Balkhi in the later literature he was from Ṭus according to Moḥammad ʿAufi's (1903 II:11) *Lubāb al-albāb*, which is the earliest biographical source. Cf. Khāleqi-Moṭlaq 1976:221–248.

[9] Cf. Tafazzoli 2000.

As Neżāmi ʿAruẓi (1985:59) relates, Fakhrod-Doula Abu Możaffar’s court minister Kh^{v}āja ʿAmid Asʿad was himself a poet of distinction and scholar of poetry (*shāʿer-shenās*), which certainly motivated Daqiqi (like his successor Farrokhi Sistāni) to visit the Chaghānid court. In the *Chahār maqāla* (Four Discourses) it is narrated that when the minister introduced Farrokhi Sistāni to the king he declared that no poet since Daqiqi had composed such excellent panegyric verses: “Your Excellency! I bring you a poet the like of whom the Eye of Time has not seen since Daqiqi’s face was veiled in death!”[10] Farrokhi Sistāni’s cicerone, the celebrated Amir Moʿezzi (1941:523), has mentioned the great favours and rewards bestowed upon Daqiqi by his Chaghānid patrons in a famous couplet:

Magnificent were the rewards that Motanabbi received from Saif al-Doula!	فرخنده بود بر متنبّی بساط سیف
As magnificent as those that the learned Daqiqi received from the Chaghānids!	چونانکه بر حکیم دقیقی چغانیان

To judge from his biographers, Daqiqi must have written much lyrical poetry that no longer survives. Only about 350 scattered distiches in the conventional forms *qaṣida* (ode), *ghazal* (lyrics), *qeṭʿe* (fragments), and *mas̲navi* (rhyming couplets) have survived. Gilbert Lazard collected the existing poetry and published it in 1964 along with a French translation and a short biographical introduction. Daqiqi’s poems had previously only existed in the form of scattered examples in anthologies, dictionaries, and treatises on rhetoric. The most important anthology is Moḥammad ʿAufi’s *Lubāb al-albāb*, composed in the first quarter of the thirteenth century (*c*. 1221), which also includes some meagre biographical details. The earliest extant dictionary is Abu Manṣur Asadi Ṭusi’s *Loghat-e Fors* (Persian Lexicon) in which verses of some seventy-eight poets are cited. Following his predecessors Rudaki (d. 941) and Shahid Balkhi (d. 935),[11] who were masters of all the poetic genres, Daqiqi’s lyrical poetry includes panegyrics, profane poems on nature, love, and wine, and moral admonition and advice (*andarz*), but also rare examples of satire, depictions of the physical milieu, and descriptions of psychological thoughts and feelings. According to Rypka (1968:99) he was conceivably the first poet to use a pen-name (*takhallos*) at the end of his *ghazal*, a custom which only later came into general use.

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[10] Neżāmi ʿAruẓi 1985:63.

Like most early Persian poets, Daqiqi makes moderate use of comparisons and metaphors. He is celebrated for his stylistic innovations in the panegyric genre, particularly his integration of charming erotic passages (*taghazzol*) into the opening of the *qaṣida*. This technique is for instance manifest in his famous poem praising Abu Saʿd Mużaffar that begins with the line *parichehre-bot-i ayyār-o delbar* ("A fairy-faced idol, unfaithful and tender"). Other stylistic skills are his nature-related descriptions of colours, adoption of concrete metaphors (for instance a scorpion-like lock of hair)[12] and use of repetition (*tekrār*) of the same word in the same distich or two adjoining ones as a means of assonance. His originality is also evident in his use of antithetical similes (*tashbih-e motażādd*), such as when he compares the bright day to the pure cheeks of the beloved, or the red ruby to her sweet lips (D 147). In these verses he realizes a more dynamic effect by changing the position of the images in the similes: it is not for instance the cheeks that resembles the bright day, but rather the day that looks like her cheeks in its intense lustre. Daqiqi's artistic mastery of the panegyric genre has been confirmed by self-flattering statements such as *madiḥ tā be bar-e man rasid ʿoriān bud / az farr-o zinat-e man yāft tilsān-o azār* ("Panegyric was bare when he came to me; I gave him all his finery and splendour"),[13] but also in these verses by Ferdousi:

He alone was my guide in poetry.	همو بود گوینده را راه بر
He set the kings upon the throne.	که شاهی نشاند ابر گاه بر
He received honour and rewards from the nobles.	همی یافت از مهتران ارج و گنج
His only trouble was his bad temper.	ز خوی بد خویش بودی به رنج
He sang the praises of the kings!	ستاینده ی شهریاران بدی
He crowned princes with his eulogies! (S 5:176)	به مدح افسر نامداران بدی

The Sāmānid dynasty took great interest in Iranian national history and entrusted a rendition of the *Shāhnāma* to Daqiqi who undoubtedly must have been considered the most distinguished of its court poets. The poet laureate set out in 976 on the commission of Nuḥ son of Manṣur to compose a version of the entire epic and deliberately commenced with the coronation of Goshtāsp and the advent of Zoroaster. Daqiqi was the second Persian poet to put the *Shāhnāma* into verse, but the work of his precursor Masʿudi Marvazi has been lost except for some fragments. His principal source was a copy of the prose *Shāhnāma-ye Abu Manṣuri* that was kept in the Sāmānid court library in Bukhara, but since this work has disappeared it is difficult to judge how closely Daqiqi follows his archetype. Daqiqi's labour

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[11] D 156, 161. There is no doubt that Daqiqi considered these two poets as his guides and inspirers, referring to Balkhi as "master" (*ostād*) and Rudaki as "the architect of all literary disciplines" (*emām-e fonun-e sokhan dar-be-dar*). In one line Daqiqi imitates Rudaki's famous image of the blossoming ("flower-like") face of the wine-drinker (D 150).

[12] D 163.

[13] D 150.

remained in progress, with only a thousand distiches having been composed, when in 976 (or in early 977), he was cruelly assassinated by his Turkish servant, considered by some modern sources to be his favourite.[14] The reason for the poet's untimely death is not known, but it seems plausible that the murder had religious or moralistic motives as the poet openly had dared to praise Zoroaster and pursued an epicurean lifestyle not untypical of the atmosphere of the medieval Persian courts with their stylish elegance, decadent pursuits, and dark intrigues. Ferdousi, who himself pursued a quiet pastoral life at great distance from the courts, alludes in his poetry to what he calls Daqiqi's vicious habits or unmalleable character (*khu-ye bad*), which can be interpreted in a psychological as well as a moral sense:

A youth, he came with brilliant speech!	جوانی بیامد گشاده زبان
He sang eloquently and had a good talent!	سخن گفتنی خوب و طبعی روان
He said: "I will retell this book in verse."	به شعر آرم این نامه را گفت من
Everyone rejoiced at his purpose.	ازو شادمان شد دل انجمن
Vicious habits were the friend of this youth.	جوانیش را خوی بد یار بود
He was always struggling against his vices.	همه ساله با بد به پیگار بود
He gave his gentle soul to his vicious habits.	بدان خوی بد جان شیرین بداد
His heart was constantly discontent with the world.	نبود از جهان دلش یکروز بود
Death unexpectedly approached him.	برو تاختن کرد ناگاه مرگ
It imposed its gloomy helmet on his head.	به سر بر نهادش یکی تیره ترگ
Fortune suddenly turned its face away.	یکایک ازو بخت برگشته شد
He perished by the hand of his own slave.	به دست یکی بنده بر کشته شد
He departed and this tale remained untold.	برفت او واین نامه ناگفته ماند
Such awakened fate and he went away! **(S I:13)**	چنان بخت بیدار او خفته ماند

Daqiqi's rhetoric paved the way for Ferdousi, who copied his predecessor's narrative method, using the same metre, and who paradoxically must be considered the cause of the former's reputation as an epic writer. While the invention of the hendecasyllabic metre (*motaqāreb*) cannot be attributed to Daqiqi, he made a major contribution to its formation and inspired the composition of many later heroic works (for instance the *Karshāspnāma*) that continued using the same metre.[15] Although Ferdousi admired Daqiqi's talent as panegyrist and considered him a forerunner (*rāhbar*) he frankly criticized his style and diction as dry and considered it inappropriate for the literary genre and purpose of the *Shāhnāma*, the national epic of Iran:

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[14] Arberry 1958:41. Daqiqi's death must roughly speaking have taken place in 976 since Ferdousi commenced his work on the *Shāhnāma* around 977.

[15] The continuity of the Iranian literary heritage, as far as the *Shāhnāmā* is concerned, is also illustrated by the fact that the hendecasyllabic metre (with four *ictus*) can be traced back to Parthian times. The first Persian works to adopt the metre were Rudaki's *Sindbādnāma* and Abu Shokur Balkhi's *Āfarin-nāma*, which only have been preserved in fragments. The *Shāhnāma* of Masʿudi Marvazi was composed in the *hazaj* metre and only survives in a few fragments in Ṭāher Maqdesi's *Ketāb al-bad' wa'l-ta'rikh (Book of Beginnings and History, c. 996).*

When this book fell into my hands	چو این نامه افتاد در دست من
my hook was angling for the fish!	به ماهی گراینده شد شست من
I glanced at the verses and they appeared weak.	نگه کردم این نظم سست آمدم
Many distiches seemed defective to me.	بسی بیت ناتندرست آمدم
I have recited from them here so that the king	من این زآن بگفتم که تا شهریار
may know how defective verses sound. [...]	بداند سخن گفتن نابکار [...]
Unless you have talent as fluent as a stream	چو طبعی نباشد چو آب روان
lay not your hand on the book of kings! (S V:175)	مبر پیش این نامه ی خسروان

Although Daqiqi’s style is monotonous and inferior in poetic imagination compared to that of Ferdousi, who brought the national epic to perfection, Theodor Nöldeke (1896:20) found the above criticism ungenerous and unfounded. Arguing that Ferdousi’s narration is not uniform throughout the work, he concluded that the poet included Daqiqi’s verses to handle a sensitive issue (the rise of Zoroastrianism) which could provoke accusations of heresy.[16] Olga Davidson (1994:20) claims however that Ferdousi’s criticism of his preceding rival should not be taken literally but as a competitive gesture typical of oral poetics. There are different explanations for the stylistic discrepancies in the work of the two poets, such as the fact that Daqiqi died at a young age without the opportunity for revision and also his presumed effort as a historian to remain faithful to his sources. Daqiqi’s narrative is rapid, sometimes even abrupt, with imagery not nearly as varied and profuse as that of his successor. He never indulges in any moral or philosophical reflections of personal nature and the portrayals of the physical settings and battle scenes are minimalistic. It is also important to observe that Ferdousi did not criticize the formal qualities, namely prosody and rhyme, of Daqiqi’s epic but only its rhetorical and aesthetic merits. Unfortunately he has not left a judgment on any other poet’s work that would allow us to compare his criteria of aesthetics, but as Davidson demonstrates (1994:24), he incorporated his forerunner’s account to appropriate “in one stroke, the cumulative poetic traditions of his Zoroastrian predecessors”.

Daqiqi promoted the patriotic tendencies in Persian poetry, praising Iranian customs and mores, such as those related to banqueting and wine-drinking. In contrast to contemporary poets, such as Manuchehri Dāmghāni, who were heavily influenced by Arabic poetry, Daqiqi kept to Iranian subject and topics. He composed numerous verses on the occasion of national festivals, such as *nouruz* and *mehrgān* (corresponding respectively to the Spring and Autumn equinoxes), which he, in accordance with Iranian national history, asserts were established by the mythical kings Jamshēd and Ferēdun.[17] As he addresses his patrons he adopts symbols and images from the Sāsānian period, such as the royal standard *Derafsh-e Kāviāni* (The Banner of Kāva), which was intimately linked to the idea of Ērānshahr and became a symbol of Iran for nationalist-minded Persian intellectuals from the ninth century onwards. Daqiqi’s descriptions of wine are natural and realistic in contrast to later

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[16] Cf. Nöldeke 1896:149.

[17] D 143, 145, 151. As Shahbazi (1996:51) has shown, many of these traditions, in particular wine-drinking and the national festivals, were condemned as anti-Islamic by contemporary Muslim scholars, such as Moḥammad Ghaẕāli.

Persian poetry where wine often is used as a symbolic metaphor. In accordance with ancient Iranian customs, he claims that wine reveals the essence of man as he really is. Wine is intimately linked to happiness and therefore one must drink at times of happiness:

Come let us drink wine and be happy!	بیا تا می خوریم و شاد باشیم
This is the time for wine and happiness! (D 145)	که هنگام می و ایّام شادیست

Daqiqi is considered one of the most important poets of the tenth century and he quickly achieved preeminent status in Iranian literary circles. His reputation among his contemporaries and influence on later Persian poets of the following centuries are testified to by the large number of his verses that are cited in medieval anthologies, dictionaries, and treatises on rhetoric. He is acclaimed for his stylistic and thematic innovations, his intellectual penetration, and his talent for expressing subtle meanings.[18] Nāṣer Khosrou (1975:7) mentions in his *Safarnāma* (Travelogue) that the poet Qaṭrān Tabrizi approached him in 1046 on his journey to Arabia and asked him to explain and elucidate some difficult passages in Daqiqi's *Divān*. This account demonstrates that copies of Daqiqi's poems had spread rapidly across the Iranian cultural sphere and that dialectical discrepancies existed between its eastern (Khorāsān) and western (Āẕarbāijān) parts because of the idiosyncrasies contained in the early literary language. Daqiqi is mentioned by Farrokhi Sistāni (1993:179) in a panegyric in praise of Abu Możaffar, which is not very surprising given his activities at the Chaghānid court. But many other later poets, such as ʿAẓā'eri Rāzi, Shamsod-din Suzani, Adib Ṣāber Termeẕi, and Tājod-din Purbahā Termeẕi, also pay tribute to him. Daqiqi is also occasionally referred to and cited in historical works, such as Abo'l-Faẓl Bayhaqi's *Tārikh-e Masʿudi* (History of Masʿud I). Lazard (1964 I:36) ranks him as the most excellent early Persian poet between Rudaki and Ferdousi, emphasizing his mastery of the major poetic forms and the variety of his lyrical themes: "Tout ceci atteste un talent non seulement brilliant, mais encore doué dans tous les genres, et, si l'on songe à la mort prematureé du poète, exceptionellement fecond."

The coming of Zoroaster

Daqiqi's literary reputation is largely owing to his epic on the rise of Zoroastrianism which Ferdousi preserved for posterity in the *Shāhnāma*. Ferdousi reveals that he incorporated his predecessor's verses into his own work because of a vision, but this claim is probably a mere poetic figment (S V:75). Daqiqi gives a fairly full account of Goshtāsp, detailing his accession; his conversion to Zoroastrianism; his family and courtiers; and the beginning of his wars with the Turānians. It is important to emphasize that his narrative in many respects reflects a legendary, rather than historical representation of Zoroaster. His account traditionally forms part of the third book of the *Shāhnāma* that deals with the semi-legendary period stretching from the reign of Lohrāsp to the life of Qobād, the father of Ardashēr I, the founder of the

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[18] ʿAufi 1903 II:11 and Ṣafā 1987:415.

Sāsānian dynasty. The most dramatic and perhaps most influential event in this part is the tale of the seven labours (*haftkh^{v}ān*) of the armour-clad hero Esfandiār, who eventually is slain by Rostam. Daqiqi's account of Goshtāsp and Zoroaster is however of particular interest because of its religious contents. The references in the Avestā to the kings and heroes of the epic are sufficient to demonstrate that the legend already existed in its essential outlines when the former work was composed. The most ancient elements of the *Shāhnāma* comprise in fact the old Iranian myths as recalled in the Gāthās, the oldest part of the Avestā. It is reasonable to assume that the tale of Goshtāsp was performed by minstrels at his own court in the form of lays in the Avestān tongue, and continued to be celebrated at Zoroastrian courts, since it was linked with the establishment and survival of the faith. As such it was handed down orally from generation to generation, and similar to many Iranian legends and semi-historical stories it was not committed to writing until the Sāsānian period (Boyce 1955).

Zoroaster appeared in the eastern part of the Iranian cultural sphere during the reign of the semi-mythic king Goshtāsp (Av. Vishtāspa),[19] son of Lohrāsp (Av. Aurvat.aspa) and the last ruler of the Kayānian dynasty. The history of Zoroaster's career involves some tenacious problems, notably the date and homeland of Goshtāsp. In Christensen's (1931:26) view, Goshtāsp, who is a most important personality in the Gāthās, must be considered a wholly historical figure and the religious tradition knows of no other early patron of the faith than him. Christensen (1931:27ff) has in fact argued for the historicity of the whole Kayānian era, which is reflected in the fact that the narrative mode of the *Shāhnāma* becomes less mythical and supernatural with less involvement of the deities. Nevertheless it is difficult to know whether the accomplishments attributed to Zoroaster are more or less historical facts, or legends that became identified with him. According to the Gāthās, Zoroaster had been persecuted in his homeland and found refuge with king Goshtāsp, who believed in him and supported him in the spreading of the new faith. He is mentioned four times by the prophet, who addresses him as Kavi. The exact status of Goshtāsp is undetermined, but his title according to Christensen (1931:9), was intimately connected with rulership among the eastern Iranians. Goshtāsp is celebrated as an ally of Zoroaster and as the establisher of the first Zoroastrian community. The Yashts also mention the struggle of Goshtāsp and Zarēr (Av. Zairivairi) of the House of Naotara against Arjāsp (Av. Arəǰat̲.aspa), the king of the Hyōns (Av. Hyaona), who are labelled as "followers of falsehood" (Av. *drəgvant*) (Yt 5:108–117; 9:30).

It is generally agreed, based on linguistic evidence, that Zoroaster and his associates belonged among the eastern Iranians, that is, to those tribes that settled in the regions on the eastern Iranian plateau.[20] Attempts at finding their exact location have proved inconclusive because of the scarcity of geographical references in the Avestā, the mythic element in traditional Iranian cosmography, and the incongruities of the later sources (Boyce 1975:3–4). The Bactrians claimed that Goshtāsp, like other Kayānian kings, had his court in Balkh and that the main scenes of his activities were in Bactria, whereas the Parthians asserted that he had erected their sacred fire Borzēn-Mehr on Mount Rēvand in Khorāsān. The Parthian version gained wide credence through pilgrims and became dominant in the late Middle Persian commentaries on the Avestā, whereas the Bactrian claim is attested in the early Islamic period but most fully set out in the *Shāhnāma*.[21] As to the date of Zoroaster, scholars are divided between those who put him in the seventh or sixth century B.C. and those who maintain a much earlier dating, around 1200 B.C. The lack of accurate information in the Avestā means that the date cannot be decided with certainty, but merely established within approximate chronological limits. Mary Boyce (1975: 3) puts the date between 1500 and 1200 B.C. based on the fact that the language of the Gāthās is approximately as archaic as the related dialect in which the Rig-Veda hymns were composed and because Zoroaster must have lived before the time of the great Iranian migrations into the land that came to be named after them (i.e. Iran). Assigning his life to a period in distant prehistory explains why only the most important facts survive in the religious and national traditions and why many details have been lost.[22]

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[19] With the normal development of Middle Persian *wi-* into *gu-*, in Persian the name became Goshtāsp. The most probable explanation of the name is "whose horses are let loose (for the race)".

[20] There is no mention of Persia and Media in the Avestā. In the *Vendīdād* (Given against the Demons) (1.3–19) seventeen lands that all belonged to the east and north-east of the Iranian plateau are enumerated. Some of these lands, which accepted the Zoroastrian faith relatively early, have been identified: Airyana Vaēǰa (the centre of the world, Chorasmia according to Henning, a mythological construct according to Gnoli), Gava (Sogdiana), Mōuru (Margiana), Bākhδī (Bactria), Nisāya (Nisa), Harōiva (Herat) and Vaēkərəta (Gandhara).

The *Dāstān-e Goshtāsp* is a literary work that cannot exclusively be treated as a historical source. It belongs to the heroic genre and is written with a specific purpose and for a specific audience. The present study is nonetheless interested in the extent to which its literal descriptions correlate with other versions of the coming of Zoroaster found in the old Avestā and the later Zoroastrian literature. The narrative background to Daqiqi's account is given by Ferdousi in the preceding chapter of the *Shāhnāma*. Goshtāsp's relationship to his father Lohrāsp, a rather uncharismatic but gentle ruler, was far from amicable, and while still a boy, the prince, dissatisfied with his position at the court, demands to be named as heir to the throne. When his demand is refused, he secretly leaves Iran and ends up in Rome (Rum), where he lives incognito until he becomes the lover and husband of the emperor's daughter Nāhid ("Venus") "whom he called Katāyun" (S V:78).[23] He succesfully undertakes great quests in Rome and it is here that a similarity can be seen with the romantic story of Zariadrēs in the history of Alexander. In the Zoroastrian tradition, Goshtāsp's wife is mentioned by the name of Ātōsā (Av. Hutaosā) of the Naotara clan (Yt 15:35). Since neither Nāhid nor Katāyun can be a misreading of Hutaosā, they must be different personages and it is likely that he married twice, first to the Roman princess in his youth and then to Ātōsā on the demise of his first queen. As Lohrāsp had decided to spend the rest of his days in the Nōbahār temple in Balkh he invites his son back to Iran promising to resign the throne in his favour.[24] Goshtāsp returns triumphantly to his home-country with his Roman bride and is reconciled with his father. According to Ferdousi, Daqiqi’s account begins as he is virtually acclaimed as the new ruler of Iran:

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[21] Boyce 1975:275–276. Bactria, as Boyce (1992:11–12) argues, was more early attested since Arabic sources (Ṭabari and Masʿudi) on the authority of the *Kh^{v}aδāy-nāmag*, insist that Goshtāsp's court was in Balkh.

[22] Cf. Gnoli 2000 and Stausberg 2002 I:26–31. Yarshater (1983:437) puts forward that the Avestān ending *aspa* ("having horse") in the names of Lohrāsp, Goshtāsp, Arjāsp, and Jāmāsp must refer to a chief element in the tribal culture of the later Kayānians in relation to the previous generation of Kayānian rulers who bore the title Kay (Av. Kavi) in the sense of "king", namely Kay Kāvad, Kay Kāvus, and Kay Khosrou.

[23] In the *Shāhnāma*, the word Rum denotes the Western clime, corresponding to Greece and Rome, which according to Iranian mythology was assigned to Salm by his father Ferēdun. According to an ancient description of the world included in the prologue of the *Shāhnāma-ye Abu Manṣuri*, Iran stretches from Oxus to the Nile and Rum is one of its neighbours (Shahbazi 1990:214).

When Lohrāsp resigned the throne to Goshtāsp,	چو گشتاسب را داد لهراسب تخت
he descended and prepared himself for journey.	فرود آمد از تخت و بر بست رخت
He was destined to go to Nōbahār in Balkh,	ببلخ گزین شد بدآن نوبهار
since the worshipers of God in that period	که یزدان پرستان بدان روزگار
held that sanctuary in reverence	مرآن خانه را داشتندی چنان
as the Arabs revere Mecca now. (S V:76–77)	که مر مکّه را تازیان این زمان

Having succeeded to his father’s throne, Goshtāsp is celebrated as possessing, like Zoroaster himself, the divine glory (*farr*), which here corresponds to the concept of royal fortune. In the *Shāhnāma* the concept of royal glory (*farr-e shāhanshāhi*) is a fundamental motif of Iranian kingship. It is presented as a divine investiture and a hereditary dynastic charisma belonging to the Iranian kings. As Daqiqi relates, Goshtāsp is acknowledged as the new monarch of Iran by the great emperors of the world except for king Arjāsp of Turān “who would not hear advice” (S V: 79). Not long after Goshtāsp’s coronation Zoroaster appears at the Kayānian court in Balkh.[25] In Daqiqi’s account the spirit of Zoroaster is metaphorically connected with a great tree, bearing the immortal fruit of wisdom, with many branches spread far and wide:

Its leafage precepts and its fruitage wisdom.	همه برگ او پند و بارش خرد
How shall the one die who has eaten such a fruit?	کسی کز خرد بر خورد کی مرد
A tree right fortunate and named Zoroaster,	خجسته پیی نام او زردهشت
who cleansed the world from evil deeds. (S V:79–80)	کز آهرمنی دست گیتی بشست

The motif of the cosmic tree is very ancient and is the common patrimony of many Indo-European peoples. In the Iranian tradition the tree can be a symbol of the prophet himself (i.e. the supreme man), of the world, and of the Bounteous Immortal (Av. *spəntəm aməshəm*) Vohu Manah (Good Mind) (Moʿin 1948:340). Zoroaster’s connection with the tree is also present in the ancient legends according to which he plants a cypress that is at the same time himself (see below). The notion that the advent of Zoroaster “cleansed the world from evil deeds” reflects the idea expressed in the Yashts that evil had to flee from the face of the earth when Zoroaster was born (Yt 17:19; 19:81).[26] In the variant reading of the Moscow edition (VI: 68) the final line of the above passage captures the very essence of Zoroaster's cosmic function in the struggle between good and evil:

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[24] The Nōbahār temple was according to Daqiqi dedicated to the sun deity Miθra (S V:77). Although it was known as a fire temple in the Zoroastrian tradition for a long period it was a Buddhist temple and the name is likely to be from the Buddhist Sanskrit *nava-vihāra (*“new monastery”). Ferdousi confuses the Nōbahār temple with the Borzēn-Mehr that was erected by Goshtāsp after the advent of Zoroaster (S V:6).

[25] The reference to Balkh as the capital of Goshtāsp is made in the later passage where the Turānian envoys arrive at his court. Cf. S V:93.

the slayer of the malignant Ahriman.[27]	که آهرمن بدکنش را بکشت

Although the meaning of this verse is similar to the expression "cleansed the world from evil deeds" in Khāleqi-Moṭlaq's version, the description of Zoroaster as the "slayer" of Ahriman (the evil spirit) more explicitly conveys the notion that the prophet embodies the triumph of good over evil. According to the Gāthās (30:3; 45: 2) good and evil are absolute, but not symmetrical, antitheses and have distinct sources, with evil trying to destroy Ahura Mazdā's creation, and good trying to sustain it. In contrast to the Abrahamic conception of God, Ahura Mazdā is all good, and no evil originates from the creator. The opposition between the spirits of good and evil is the great drama of choice dominating the life of man and the destiny of the world. Although there is no mention in Daqiqi's account of Zoroaster's early career or his denunciation of the ritual practices of the old religion, it is clear that he has received a revelation and the gift of preaching.[28] The prophet considers himself a visionary and publicly proclaims his new religion to Goshtāsp, inviting him to follow his teachings:

He addressed the Kayānian king: "I am a prophet!	به شاه کیان گفت پیغامبرم
I will bring you wisdom as a guide." (S V:80)	سوی تو خرد رهنمون آورم

Zoroaster is presented by the poet in accordance with the Avestā as a prophet who advocates wisdom and goodness.[29] In Zoroastrianism the highest praise is given to wisdom (*kherad*) both as the predominant cosmic force in the universe and as innate human wisdom or good judgment. The centrality of wisdom is reflected in the fact that Mazdā – which is generally taken to be the proper name of the highest deity of worship – means "wisdom". The above reference to wisdom can hence be interpreted according to both meanings. In Daqiqi's account Zoroaster invites the king to learn about God's ways and religion (*rāh o āyin-e uy*). The poet generally refers to Zoroastrianism by its traditional Zoroastrian name the "good religion" (*dēn-e behi*) and identifies it as opposed to the religion of "falsehood" (*drug*).[30] Zoroaster imagined humanity as divided into two opposing parties, and the term "good religion" (*vaŋuhī daēnā*)[31] is adopted in the Gāthās (Y 53.1–4) as the communal expression of the faith. The epithet "good" is in accordance with the Zoroastrian triad of good "thought, word, and deed", and with the Gāthic description of Ahura Mazdā as the father of "good thinking" (Y 47.2). The conflict between Zoroaster's associates (the Avestān people) and their enemies (the Turānians), who remained faithful to the old religion, is given cosmic dimensions in Daqiqi's account and is perceived as constituting a dynamic phase in the dualistic struggle between good and evil.

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[26] Cf. Dk 5:2; 7:4.63.

[27] In the *Shāhnāma* Ahriman is referred to as Āherman or Ahreman according to the exigencies of metre and rhyme.

[28] There is no mention in Daqiqi's verses of Zoroaster's age upon his arrival at Goshtāsp's court. According to the *Dēnkard* (Dk 4:1) *he began to preach at the age of thirty and was received by the patron ten years later*. This account is also confirmed by the Pahlavi text *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram (Anthology of Zādspram)* written by the ninth-century Zoroastrian scholar and author *Zādspram.*

[29] Schaeder (1932:295) claims that the description of Zoroaster as a prophet (*payghāmbar*) reflects the Islamic concept of divine messenger (*rasul*). This view is incorrect since Zoroaster appears in the Gāthās as well as the Zand literature as a prophet rather than a philosopher or a lawgiver.

[30] Daqiqi refers to Zoroastrianism as the "pure religion" (*dēn-e pāk*) and Ferdousi twice calls it the "religion of God" (*dēn-e yazdān*). Cf. S V:117 and VIII:160.

According to the *Shāhnāma*, Zoroaster claims before Goshtāsp to have received a revelation in the presence of the one supreme Creator in which he was taught the principles of the good religion. Daqiqi's description of the Zoroastrian God and His creation of heaven and earth (*āsmān o zamin*) are in accordance with the description in the Gāthās (Y. 44:4) of Ahura Mazdā as the creator of the skies, the earth, the plants, and the waters.[32] As illustrated in the conversion of Goshtāsp he presents Zoroaster's religion as a faith based on wisdom and free will. It is a faith that demands adherence by conscious choice. The prophet is described as an ethical dualist who instructs people to make the right choice between good and evil:

"Reflect and act according to the religion.	نگر تا چه گوید برآن کار کن
Choose wisdom and [good] speech in this world.	خرد برگزین از جهان و سخن
Learn the teachings of the good religion	بیاموز آیین و دین بهی
since governance is not well without faith!" (S V:80)	که بی‌دین ناخوب باشد مهی

The basic opposition between good and evil is projected on all spiritual and mundane levels where the two poles are opposed. Sovereignty cannot be separated from conformity to the Zoroastrian faith. It is significant that in Daqiqi's version the prophet believes in the sacred foundation of governance, even stating that secular power has no worth without divine authority. The notion of the equally indispensible roles of the supreme religious authority (Zoroastrianism) and the temporal power (monarchy) is not a genuine Avestān idea but replicates later Sāsānian concepts of religion and kingship, which indicates that in this respect Daqiqi's original sources belonged to that period.

Goshtāsp immediately embraced Zoroaster's religion and assembled his family,

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[31] Insler (Y 53.1, footnote) translates this term as "good conception", that is "the good vision of a world ruled by truth and good thinking". Cf. Y 44.10.

[32] Cf. S V:80. In the words of Turānian king Arjāsp, as he summons and informs the priests about Zoroaster's appearance, the prophet had been brought into the immediate presence of God by means of what appears to have been a heavenly journey:

He says: "I have come down from heaven.	همی گوید از آسمان امدم
I have come down from the master of the world.	ز نزد خدای جهان آمدم
I have beheld the Lord in paradise.	خداوند را دیدم اندر بهشت
I have beheld the Zand-Avestā in His writing." (S V:86)	من این زند و استا همه زو نوشت

From this verse it is evident that Daqiqi had an incorrect understanding of the difference between the Avestā and its late Middle Persian commentaries, e.g. the Zand. The compound construction Zand-Avestā (which appears as *zand o ostā* in the *Shāhnāma*) became prevalent in the early Islamic period and it is not clear if Daqiqi made any distinction between them.

his ministers, physicians, governors, and generals, who all collectively converted to the new faith. Among the first converts were his father Lohrāsp and his brother Zarēr, but there is no mention of the conversion of his wife Ātōsā and his eldest son, the crown-prince Esfandiār, who became a zealous champion of the Zoroastrian faith. The Yashts narrate that Ātōsā was influential in Goshtāsp's conversion and according to tradition she herself was the first convert to Zoroastrianism (Yt 9:26). In the *Shāhnāma* the conversion ceremony is described as assuming the sacred "girdle" (*kosti*) but there is no mention of other Zoroastrian ritual practices in this passage apart from the veneration of fire.[33] The custom of the girdle goes back to the Indo-Iranian initiation ritual where men put on a woven cord as a sign of their membership in the religious community. The symbolism of the cord were made more elaborate during the centuries and still today Zoroastrian men and women wear the cord at the time of initiation and for their daily prayers. From the *Shāhnāma* it is not apparent on what grounds Goshtāsp accepted the faith, but it seems probable that it was the priority given by Zoroaster to wisdom (which is accentuated by Daqiqi). The advent of Zoroaster was in any case so transformative that as a result of his glory (*farr*) evil disappeared from the hearts of wicked, the seeds were cleansed from all defilement, and the graves (*dakhmahā*) were covered by spiritual radiance.[34] It is significant that in one ancient manuscript version (London dated 1276) Zoroaster is portrayed in this passage as a healer, who cured the new believers from different illnesses, since this view reflects the priestly tradition as embodied in the *Dēnkard* (Dk 7:5.9–10) and other Pahlavi works.[35]

After his conversion Goshtāsp dispatched his troops throughout the provinces and sent Zoroastrian scholars (*mobadān*) to propagate the faith and set up fire-temples throughout the kingdom. Although it is impossible to reconstruct the early spread of Zoroastrianism from a historical point of view, Zoroaster probably played an active role in organizing the new society and establishing religious practices and norms of conduct. The spread of the religion was most likely the work of numerous individual missionaries going from one community to another. Daqiqi's account is in accordance with the general notion in the Yashts that Goshtāsp, by adopting Zoroaster's religion, helped to pave the way for righteousness in the world (Yt 13:99; 19:93). However, in contrast to the later Pahlavi literature, his principal interest is not the spread of the faith throughout the seven regions (*haft keshvar*) but the heroic battles fought by Goshtāsp, his brother, and his sons against the Turānians. From a thematic point of view this feature shows that he draws heavily on the royal tradition with its interest in the protection of the homeland and the victorious battles of the Kayānian dynasty. As Daqiqi relates, Zoroaster then built the fire-temple Borzēn-Mehr[36] in the city where Goshtāsp had his court. The tradition of the historical foundation of this fire-temple is lost in antiquity but it was established in north-eastern Iran as suggested by its Parthian name Borzēn ("Exalted"). The precise location of the fire is not known, but according to Zoroastrian tradition it was enthroned on Mount Rēvand (Av. Raēvant) in a dependency of Nishāpur (in former Parthian territory). Since Daqiqi had previously referred to Balkh as Goshtāsp's capital the story here takes an unexpected Parthian turn.

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[33] S V:81. Ferdousi, like Daqiqi, is well informed about the spiritual foundation of the Zoroastrian veneration of fire. He defends Zoroastrianism against the common Muslim accusations of "fire-worship" (*mapendār ke ātash-parastān budand*) and describes the purpose of pilgrimage to the fire temple as "to pray before God" (*dar pēsh-e yazdān budand*) (S IV:312).

[34] S V:81. As Moʿin (1948:339) explains, the notion that the graves were covered by spiritual light must be considered a Muslim influence since any place for the dead is considered impure and a potential pollutant according to Zoroastrian beliefs. It is however significant that Daqiqi adopts the Zoroastrian word *dakhma*.

[35] Cf. S V:81.

The Borzēn-Mehr seems to have been the most glorious fire among the Parthians and was considered by posterity as a sacred fire of the highest grade (MP *ātakhsh ī vahrām*) along with the fires of Farnbāg and Goshnasp. According to later Pahlavi sources such as *Bundahishn* (18.2–7) the Borzēn-Mehr was associated with Zoroaster and Goshtāsp, and was believed to have been brought into existence by and to have burned in front of Ahura Mazdā. This is reflected in Ferdousi's words in the continuation of the *Dāstān-e Goshtāsp* that the prophet "brought a container for burning incense out of heaven" (S V:352). In the Sāsānian period the Borzēn-Mehr was downgraded with respect to the two great western Iranian fires but it nevertheless retained its fame and glory in the three-fold political and ecclesiastical division of Iran between the Parthians, the Persians, and the Medes. The Persian fire of Farnbāg and the Median fire of Goshnasp were held to represent the priesthood and the warriors, while the guardianship of the lowly third estate of society, i.e. the classes of herdsmen and farmers, was relegated to the Borzēn-Mehr. This three-fold division is envisaged in the *Kārnāmag ī Ardashīr ī Pābagān* (The Acts of Ardashēr son of Pābag) where Pābag sees in a dream that the great sacred fires are burning in the house of Sāsān, which is interpreted as a sign that the "sovereignty of the world" will come to Sāsān or a member of his family.[37] As Boyce (1983:473) explains, the real character of Borzēn-Mehr has been forgotten in history and it is not known how long it remained under Islamic rule: "It may be safely assumed that the fire was a great centre of pilgrimage, even after the fall of the Arsacids; but how long its priests were able to preserve it in the Islamic period is not recorded."

As Daqiqi relates Zoroaster, then planted a cypress sapling before the temple portal saying that this "noble cypress" (*sarv-e āzāda*) had been "divinely sent from heaven" (*ze mēnō ferestād ze man khodāy*) (S V:83). The word for heaven (*mēnō*, MP *mēnōg*) has the etymological meaning "spiritual" or "of the spirit" and refers more generally to the spiritual world or a spiritual state as contrasted to the physical world or a physical condition (*gētē*, MP *gētīg*) in the Zoroastrian tradition. Daqiqi's reference to a transcendent origin of the cypress has important cosmic implications since the *mēnōg* creation is immune to the assaults of Ahriman (Boyce 1975:230). There is however no mention of a sacred cypress in the Avestā and the legend seems to have developed under the influence of the myth about the Borzēn-Mehr. In the *Shāhnāma* the straight-stemmed tree is called Kashmar after its alleged location on

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[36] Borzēn-Mehr appears as Mehr-Borzēn in the text according to the exigencies of metre and rhyme.

[37] Asha 1999:11–13.

Mount Rēvand in the Nishāpur Mountains.[38] Arabic sources provide historical evidence of the existence of a sacred cypress in Kashmar that flourished majestically until 861 when it was desecrated in accordance with an edict of the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Motavakkel. The caliph, according to Ṯaʿālabi Nishāburi, ordered his governor in Khorāsān to have the cypress cut into pieces and sent to Baghdad to the profound grief of the local Zoroastrians. He was not however able to see the tree himself since he was assassinated before the convoy reached the capital.[39] It is evident from the geographical shift in the narrative from Balkh to Kashmar that Daqiqi fitted together the rival Bactrian and Parthian claims about the centre of Zoroaster's activities, probably already present in his sources, into a continuous narrative leaving incompatibilities unresolved.

In Daqiqi's account the cypress essentially has a symbolic importance for the foundation of the Zoroastrian religion but it also acquires a cosmic function as the spiritual tree of the good spirit that helps the believer "to ascend to heaven" (*z-injā be mēnō gerāy*) (S V:83). This cosmic significance is also reinforced by the poet's assertion that Zoroaster "bound the demon in fetters" at the temple (*bebast andar u div rā*) (S V:84). The allusion to a demon should be interpreted as referring to the general personification of evil since there is no mention of a specific demon in this passage. The foundation of a new cosmic order by Zoroaster hence signifies the replacement of disorder and chaos by peace and stability. The planting of the cypress is more specifically a memorial of Goshtāsp's conversion to Zoroastrianism, since Daqiqi mentions that the prophet placed an inscription upon the tree to proclaim that his first convert had embraced the new faith and as a testimony that "wisdom was disseminating justice". Although the legend is most likely of Parthian origin, this expression by the poet reflects the Sāsānian notion of the "holy empire" if wisdom (*kherad*) and justice (*dād*) are understood as metaphors for religion and the worldly order respectively:

He wrote on the tall cypress tree:	نبشتش بر این زاد سرو سهی
"Goshtāsp has accepted the good religion."	که پذیرفت گشتاسپ دین بهی
He made the noble cypress witness	گوا کرد مر سرو آزاد را
that wisdom was disseminating justice. (S V:82)	چنین گستراند خرد داد را

According to Daqiqi, the cypress grew so huge in a few years that "a lasso (*kamand*) could not surround its trunk" (S V:82). As the cypress matured, Goshtāsp erected over it a magnificent palace with large vaulted halls (*eyvān*) made of gold and precious stones. On its inner walls, the court artists painted the images of ancient Iranian kings, such as Jamshēd and his descendant Ferēdun. The king then declared it an official place of pilgrimage and invited peoples of all nations to embrace Zoroastrianism and to visit the holy shrine and marvel at the cypress:

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[38] In *Bundahishn* it is similarly stressed that the abode of Borzēn-Mehr was on Mount Rēvand. Cf. *The Bundahishn or Knowledge from the Zand*, ed. E. W. West, Oxford, 1897, 17:8 and 12:18.

[39] Cf. Nafisi 1948:164–169.

Now everyone who hears my advice	کنون هرکه این پند من بشنوید
come to the Kashmar cypress on foot!	پیاده سوی سرو کشمر روید
Adopt you all the way of Zoroaster	بگیرید یک سر ره زردهست
and do not give praise to the Chinese idol![40]	به سوی بت چین مدارید یشت
In the glory and greatness of the monarch of Iran	به برز و فر شاه ایرانیان
put on the girdle around your loins!	ببندید کستی همه بر میان
Follow the custom of tying the girdle.	به آیین کستی ببستن روید
Trust in the shadow of this cypress tree.[41]	بدین سایه‌ی سروبن بغنوید
Fix your gaze upon the fire-temple	سوی گنبد آذر آرید روی
as bidden by the truthful prophet. (S V:83–84)	به فرمان پیغامبر راست‌گوی

The sanctity of the tree is suggested by its status as a miracle bearing witness to the truth and grandeur of Zoroaster’s religion, but it is also accentuated by Daqiqi’s words “come on foot”. He alludes to the Turānians as worshippers of Chinese idols (*bot-e chin*), which must be a reference to the old Iranian veneration of nature deities (Av. *yazata-*), since Zoroaster had proclaimed Ahura Mazdā to be the one uncreated God and Creator of all other beneficent deities. The portrayal of Zoroaster as an iconoclast may also reflect religious conditions in the Sāsānian period when the Zoroastrian priesthood demolished images of deities and encouraged people to visit fire temples. The term “Chinese” is used as synonymous with Turānian in the *Shāhnāma*. The references alternatively to Turān, Turk, and Chinese also reflect notions and conditions of the late Sāsānian period when the Turkish nomads began to threaten Iran’s north-eastern frontier. It is important to observe that Daqiqi distinguishes between various forms of pre-Zoroastrian religious practice. While he disapproves of the Turānian idol worship he commends the old Iranian veneration of the sun (closely linked to Av. Miθra, MP Mēhr) as illustrated in his reference to Lohrāsp’s sanctuary in the Nōbahār temple of Balkh:

He stood in God’s presence for thirty years.	همی بود سی سال پیشش به پای
Such is the way that men should serve the Lord.	برآنسان پرستید باید خدای
He offered supplication to the sun	نیایش همی کرد خورشید را
according to the custom of Jamshēd. (S V:77)	چنان بوده بد راه جمشید را

The religious was between Iran and Turān

In Daqiqi’s account, the fire-temple Borzēn-Mehr soon became an object of devotion and pilgrimage as people were attracted to the new faith. Zoroaster played a key role in the social reconstruction and material rebuilding of the Iranian realm, advising Goshtāsp on spiritual as well as mundane matters. As Daqiqi relates, the king had good fortune in governance and the nation prospered because his star was “blessed” (*khojasta*) (S V:84). At this stage Arjāsp of Turān, fearing the growing strength of Iran, enters the narrative and demands tribute (*bāzh*) from Goshtāsp. In the *Shāhnāma* the Turānian kings and their armies are often depicted as representatives of the cosmic evil spirit (Ahriman) and there is a general tendency in Iranian national history to regard them as the natural foes of the Iranians. The Turānians (Av. Tūiriya) are however an Iranian people from the standpoint of the Avestā.[42] The conflicts between the Avestān people and some of the Tūiriya are mentioned in the Fravardīn Yasht, which suggests that the oppositions resulted from Zoroaster's proselytizing in Turānian regions (Yt 13:37–38).[43] The matter of tribute must be considered an anachronism since there is no mention of Iran's vassal relationship to Turān in other sources. In Daqiqi's account Zoroaster advises Goshtāsp to reject Arjāsp's demand for tribute and defend Iran's independence:

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[40] It is significant that Daqiqi uses the Zoroastrian term *yasht* (worship by praise) above.

[41] The protective shade of the cypress is a common metaphor in classical Persian poetry.

The sage Zoroaster told the Kayānian king:	به شاه کیان گفت زردشت پیر
"It is not in accordance with our faith	که در دین ما این نباشد حژیر
that you should pay tribute to the ruler of China.	که تو باژ بدهی به سالار چین
This is unauthorized in our religion!" (S V:84–85)	نه اندر خور دین ما باشد این

Zoroaster claimed that no king in Iran in the past had paid tribute to the rulers of Turān and that its north-eastern neighbour always had been powerless (*tāv*) against Iran. In this respect Daqiqi's representation of Zoroaster reflects the royal tradition in Iranian national history with its emphasis on patriotism and the protection of the homeland. The prophet's instruction, as the poet relates, had a deep impact on Goshtāsp, since the loyal king consented to his advice. This is the last time Zoroaster speaks in the *Shāhnāma*.

Arjāsp, who already was annoyed at what he considered a betrayal of the old faith, was brought news by a "valiant demon" (*narre div-i*) about the intentions of the Iranian king (S V:85). This demon is absent in the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān*, but is referred to as "the demon of wrath" (*khēshm dīv*, Av. Aēshəma) in the *Dēnkard* (Dk 7:4.87), which gives an extensive legendary biography of Zoroaster. In the Zoroastrian tradition the demons (Av. *daēva*s) play an important role in the existential drama and are responsible for cosmic and corporeal destruction as well as moral and social corruption. According to the Yashts, Aēshəma has the position of helper and messenger of the evil spirit (Av. *angra mainyu*) but his role is secondary since evil is not considered a creative force in the cosmic order (Yt 10:93; 19: 46). As is evident from Daqiqi's description, the term *narre div-i* can be interpreted metaphysically as meaning a distinct demon, but it can also be understood psychologically as the function and quality of that demon realized in man. In the same passage of the *Dēnkard* it is also mentioned that when Goshtāsp had embraced the new religion the demons of hell were troubled and "the demon of wrath" rushed to the "wicked Arjāsp" inciting him to war. This is reflected in Daqiqi's words that the Turānian ruler had "the demons for servants" and hence "was doomed to chains" (S V:79). Although the royal tradition operated with concepts animating the priestly tradition, the fact that Daqiqi mentions a demon in this context unmistakably reflects his religious orientation and suggests that he had access to a more archaic, priestly version of the story.

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[42] In the Fravardīn Yasht the Tūiriya are recognized as an Iranian people along with the Airiya, Sairima, Sāinu, and Dāhi (Yt 13:143–144). Airiya appears to be the term the Avestān people use of themselves. In the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān*, Arjāsp is described as the lord of the Hyōn or Xyōn (Av. Hyaona), a hostile tribe who adhered to the pre-Zoroastrian religion and who have been identified with the Chionites of the classical texts.

[43] Cf. Nyberg 1937:280–294.

It is significant that Arjāsp takes to the sword at the instigation of a "demon", since war is considered fundamentally evil in Zoroastrianism. It is associated with the evil spirit (Ahriman), who is ignorant and wholly malign, in contrast to peace, which is related to Ahura Mazdā. In his study on the concepts of war and peace in Iranian traditions Bo Utas (2008:42) demonstrates that the Zoroastrian view, as expressed in the Gāthās, insists that "'peace' (or at least 'concord') is something morally good and desirable in itself, while 'war' (or 'discord') is something morally bad and worthy of blame". This religious conception survives in Iranian national history writings as shown by many central passages relating to war and peace (*jang o āshti*) in the *Shāhnāma*.[44] In Daqiqi's account, the disapproving attitude to war is reflected in the fact that Goshtāsp's trusted advisor and vizier Jāmāsp (Av. Jāmāspa) is disheartened (*nayāmad kh^{v}osh*) when Goshtāsp asks him to teach him the strategies and tactics of war, even though he knows that the enemy is approaching.[45] It is also exhibited in the poet's words after having counted the losses on each side in the second war between Iran and Turān in which Iran was victorious: "Shun, if you can, such ill scenes evermore" (S V:149).

Arjāsp is filled with contempt for Zoroaster and reacts fiercely to Goshtāsp's refusal to pay the tribute. In a letter addressed to Goshtāsp he threatens to resume the ancient struggle between the two nations if the Iranian king does not abandon Zoroastrianism, return to the old faith, and pay tribute in compliance with his demands. He praises the kings of the Kayānian dynasty and offers bribes, but threatens to lay the whole country waste if Goshtāsp is misled by the "old charlatan" (*pir-e jādu*), referring to Zoroaster (S V:90). Arjāsp's line of reasoning suggests that the cause of his indignation is not the issue of the tribute but Goshtāsp's conversion and the rapid spread of Zoroaster's doctrines. This account of the conflict, which exists in the *Dēnkard* (Dk 7:4.77) but is absent in the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān*, is in accordance with the Gāthic view that the followers of the old religion did not gently acquiesce in the new religious authority claimed by Zoroaster. Resenting the establishment of the new faith, Arjāsp bitterly laments:

"All have freely embraced his religion	گرفتند از او سر به سر دین اوی
The world has become filled with his cult!	جهان پر شد از راه و آیین اوی
He has established himself as a prophet in Iran	نشست اندر ایران به پیغامبری
by such obscene methods and reckless words!" (S V:87)	به کاری چنان یافه و سرسری

When Arjāsp's letter is delivered to the Iranian court by his brother, the warrior champion Biderafsh, Goshtāsp assembles Zoroaster and his court ministers to take counsel with them on the issue. The Iranian king is firm in his belief in the new religion and claims his own superiority over Arjāsp by virtue of his noble descent from Iraj, the youngest son of Ferēdun. An interesting aspect of Daqiqi's version is that it is Goshtāsp's brother Zarēr and son Esfandiār (Av. Spəntōδāta), and not Zoroaster or Jāmāsp, who gives the definite response after the king has spoken, declaring their readiness to go to war if Arjāsp does not surrender to Goshtāsp and embrace Zoroaster's teachings.[46] Although Zoroaster is mentioned by name he is placed entirely in the periphery of the dramatic events that unfold. The remainder of Daqiqi's verses contain a detailed description of the religious war between Goshtāsp and Arjāsp. Goshtāsp consents to the will of Zarēr and Esfandiār and sends envoys to Arjāsp rejecting his demands. This tension is the beginning of a series of armed confrontations between the two countries. The *Dēnkard* (Dk 7:4.87) and the *Shāhnāma* concur that the war was fought in defence of the new faith, which is also indicated by the epithets given to the Turānians in these sources. According to the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān* however it is the pious Zarēr who initiates the battle and is instrumental in the Iranian victory.

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[44] For quotations and references to Ferdousi, see Utas 2008:31–46.

[45] Cf. S V:107.

Conclusions

A close reading of the *Dāstān-e Goshtāsp* demonstrates that Daqiqi is heavily influenced by Zoroastrian religious and ethical concepts. He presents Zoroastrianism in accordance with the Avestā as a monotheistic religion that emphasizes to the dualistic struggle between good and evil. Zoroaster is portrayed as a prophet who advocated wisdom and goodness. He is the founder of the "good religion" (*dēn-e behi*) and his revelation, as contained in the Avestā, is praised by Daqiqi. Using the metaphor of a tree he portrays the prophet's coming as that of a great tree, bearing the immortal fruit of wisdom, with many branches spread far and wide. This favourable description of Zoroaster is far from the conventional Muslim view and stands in sharp contrast to contemporary Arabic sources (Ṭabari, Ṯaʿālabi Nishāburi, etc.) that denounce him as a false prophet and describe his teachings as based on a collection of superstitions. In Daqiqi's account he is a charismatic leader and eloquent orator, who guides Goshtāsp and his associates to God. As far as Zoroaster's character is concerned, he is represented as a wise, benevolent, and truthful person. Influenced by the royal tradition of the Sāsānian period, the poet also emphasizes his strong sense of patriotism and social consciousness. His religious instructions are intended to promote the protection and welfare of Iran, not least in relation to its Turānian enemy. Daqiqi's reliance on Sāsānian sources is also evident in the fact that Zoroaster is presented as advocating religion and kingship as comparable counterparts.

Given the Zoroastrian theme of the coming of Zoroaster it is important to observe that there are no substantial "concessions" in Daqiqi's account to the Muslim audience beyond linguistic and stylistic elements. There are for instance none of the inserted Qur'anic or Biblical quotations or references that are so common in the Arabic renderings of Iranian national history (even in the work of Ebn Moqaffaʿ). On the contrary, the poet consciously brings up features of Zoroastrianism, such as the practice of next-of-kin marriage (in his case between

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[46] Cf. S V:95.

Esfandiār and Homāy), which could directly offend his Muslim audience. This feature acquires a special significance if we take into consideration some of his lyrical poems that bear resemblance to Zoroastrian confessions. In comparison with the priestly tradition it is significant that Daqiqi concentrates on the life of the historical Zoroaster and does not attempt to idealize the prophet. Whereas the Zoroastrian biographies in the Middle Persian literature refer to an ideal and attempt to situate the prophet to the realm of legend, Daqiqi's description is much more sparse and largely corresponds to the scanty historical facts known from the old Avestā. Zoroaster lived for many years after Goshtāsp's conversion, but little is known of his life either before or after this crucial event. The poet's account is more related to the genre of history than the genre of romance, where miracles and fantastic events are abound, since the qualities and actions attributed to Zoroaster only sporadically correspond to what we find in myth. As regards the Zoroastrian character of the epic, it is also important to note that Daqiqi does not situate the coming of Zoroaster within the cosmological calendar or millennial scheme of later Zoroastrian apocalyptic speculation (which of course belongs to a different literary genre). In contrast to the *Bundahishn*, which assigns to the world a duration of twelve thousand years and situates the rise of Zoroastrianism in the fourth millennium, there are no chronological links in Daqiqi's account with the sequence of cosmological processes or events.

Many streams of tradition – religious, royal, and heroic – converge and cross-influence each other in various ways in the *Dāstān-e Goshtāsp*. The traditions differ in emphasis and in their evaluation of individual events and characters. Apart from the three major traditions of the Iranian national epic, Daqiqi draws on historical material from his own period as illustrated in his description of the originally Parthian legend of the Borzēn-Mehr and the cypress of Kashmar, which flourished in a dependency of Nishāpur until 871. The poet largely keeps to the royal tradition even if he is heavily influenced by the priestly tradition as regards details concerning the coming of Zoroaster and the conflict between Iran and Turān. His reliance on the priestly tradition is illustrated by his description of the causes of the war as well as the function of the "valiant demon", which is identical to the "demon of wrath" (Av. Aēshəma) of the Zoroastrian tradition. It is important to observe that the poet consciously adopts these features to render the story a religious dimension, and his allusions to material contained in the priestly tradition are not just perfunctory references to the religious subject matter. Daqiqi's reliance on the royal tradition must however be considered highly conventional since it includes very little innovative or imaginative thinking in comparison to Ferdousi. The royal tradition also comprises a strong heroic component since the Kayānian cycle embodies the literature of the most notable heroic age in the Iranian tradition. This feature is reflected in the tone and rhetoric of the epic, which are more heroic than religious. The poet holds on to some conventions of epic poetry such as rich hyperbole, fixed epithets, and an abundance of formal repetitions.

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Life, As I See It

A Typology of the Post-Revolutionary Persian Novel Written by Women*

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Abstract
Since the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the number of women novelists has increased explosively. One remarkable feature of most post-Revolutionary novels by Iranian women is their great sensitivity towards women's issues and gender relations, but not all of these novels are of this nature. Novels that focus on social discourses have also been written by women in post-Revolutionary Iran. Nor do all of the novels written by women challenge the traditional institutions or reflect a protest against the situation of Iranian women in post-Revolutionary Iran. The purpose of this paper is to present a typology of the Persian post-Revolutionary novels written by women and the different paths they have taken.

Keywords: The Post-Revolutionary Persian Novel, Women Novelists, Social Novels, Popular Novels, Feminist Novels

Introduction

Since the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the number of women establishing themselves in different fields of artistic endeavour such as film, theatre, music, art, and short story and novel writing has increased explosively.[1] This increase in the number of women novelists has been striking. It is all the more striking when we look at the history of the Persian novel. Compared to Europe, the novel, as a literary genre, came very late to the Middle East and Iran. It does not go back any farther than the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,[2] when the modernization of this part of the world began.

Although the construction of modern Iranian society, at least in the beginning, was limited to the establishment of economic and military institutions, one could not prevent the intrusion of other aspects of Western civilization. The introduction of printing and journalism, and the translation of Western literary works were among the crucial factors that influenced the rise of the Persian novel in the early decades of the twentieth century. Among the other factors that led to the rise of the Persian novel, one can mention Iranian students who had been sent to the West to study, and other Iranians who lived in exile in neighbouring countries, e.g. Russia and Turkey, where they contributed to the rise of the new literary genre.[3]

Obviously, Iranian women did not play any role in this process. The traditional structure of Iranian society was too strong to let women take part in the construction of a modern Iran. When the process of modernization accelerated at the time of Reza Shah, who founded the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, the novelistic genre became more and more popular.

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[1] According to Abedini (2004), in the 1990s for example there were 370 women novelists and short story writers in Iran.

[2] See Ahmadzadeh (2003); Balaÿ (1998).

[3] For more information on the process of modernization in Iran see Keddie (2003); Abrahamian (1982); and Fazlhashemi (1999).

Despite the fact that the Persian novel was growing rapidly, there were almost no signs of the presence of Iranian women among the Persian novelists during the whole period of Reza Shah's reign (1925–1941). During this period, the presence of women was limited to the world of the novels, which was created by the male novelists. Women were mostly presented as creatures deceived and deprived by the modern way of life and as prostitutes in the heart of the big cities.[4] *Tehrān-e makhuf* (The Horrible Tehran) by Morteza Moshfeq Kazemi (1925) and *Zibā* (Ziba) by Mohammad Hejazi (1933) are two such novels in which the women characters are pictured as morally corrupted. The only two women novelists of this period were Irandokht Teymourtash (1916–1991) with her novel *Dokhtar-e tirebakht va javān-e bolhavas* (The Ill-fated Girl and the Whimsical Young Man) from 1930, and Zahra Khanlari (1915–1991) with her two novels *Parvin va Parviz* (Parvin and Parviz) from 1933, and *Rahbar-e dushizegān* (The Leader of the Girls) from 1936. Neither Irandokht Teymurtash nor Zahra Khanlari continued their careers as novelists.

By the time of the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the Persian novel had developed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Nevertheless, it is again impossible to name more than a few female novelists during this period. Two examples are Simin Daneshvar (1921–2012) and Shahrnush Parsipur (1946–). Simin Daneshvar published her novel *Sauvushun* (Mourners of Siavash) in 1969 and later became the most famous Persian woman novelist in Iran. Shahrnush Parsipur published her novel *Sag va zemestān-e boland* (The Dog and the Long Winter) in 1974. *Sauvushun* and *Sag va zemestān-e boland* were both social novels. Apart from these two novels, one can hardly find any novel written by women under Mohammad Reza Shah's reign (1941–1978) and before the 1979 Revolution. It is only since the Revolution that the women have taken a prominent position in the field of Persian fiction in general and the Persian novel in particular.[5] What makes this development especially interesting is that it has taken place in total contrast to the attitudes of the Islamic leadership towards women and the systematic attempts to limit their public presence.

Since the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the idea of constructing an Islamic society has been the main agenda of the Iranian authorities. The enmity of the Islamic doctrine promulgated by Ayatollah Khomeini to the idea of free women enjoying equal rights with men, had shown itself since the early 1960s when Khomeini opposed the Shah's programme for the emancipation of Iranian women. Thus, it was not strange that women were one of the major obstacles to the establishment of Khomeini's desired theocratic system. One of the main aims of the Islamic doctrine imposed by the Iranian theocracy was to compel Iranian women to follow Islamic law. However, experiences from the last thirty-three years show that this has not been an easy task for the Islamic regime. The aftermath of the Islamic Revolution witnesses to nothing but the long-standing struggle of Iranian women for their basic rights. Challenging the restrictive fundamentalist Islamic laws, establishing themselves in different social organizations, and most of all, searching for their identity have been the main objectives of Iranian women in post-Revolutionary Iran. The 1979 Revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, the political turbulence, the great wave of repression in the 1980s, and the mass emigration of several million Iranians all affected Iranian women strongly. Having been cast into these great crises, Iranian women felt more than ever the need to express themselves and to redefine their identities. They found the novel to be the most appropriate genre for them to express themselves. This is not surprising as the novel has usually been described as the best literary genre for reflecting the different aspects of human life in detail. The purpose of this paper is to present a typology of the Persian post-Revolutionary novels written by women and the different paths they have taken.[6]

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[4] Gheissari (1998: 60); Meskub (1994: 134).

[5] There are novels written by women that have been reprinted more than forty times, for example, *Bāmdād-e khomār* (Drunkard Morning) (1995) by Fattane Haj Seyyed Javadi, and several women novelists have won highly prestigious literary prizes in Iran, for example, Fariba Vafi, Shiva Arastuyi, and Sepide Shamlu.

Talattof maintains that one remarkable feature of post-Revolutionary literary works by Iranian women is their great sensitivity towards women's issues and gender relations.[7] Women's personal and private experiences become public and they use the literary text to express their protest against sexual oppression and their struggle for identity. Comparing pre-Revolutionary works by women with post-Revolutionary works, Talattof identifies a shift from social discourses to feminism in Iranian women's literature. He considers the Iranian Revolution of 1979 to be the major historical event that separates these two discourses and the main reason behind this shift.[8]

This is very much true, but it must be noted that not all of the post-Revolutionary novels written by women are of this nature. Novels that focus on social discourses have also been written by women in post-Revolutionary Iran. Nor do all of the novels written by women challenge the traditional institutions or reflect a protest against the situation of Iranian women in post-Revolutionary Iran. The construction of womanhood, the demands and aspirations of the women presented in Persian post-Revolutionary novels are not all the same, due to the authors' different cultural and class-based experiences. While one group of women novelists challenges the traditional cultural structures, as mentioned by Talattof, another group is more interested in preserving these structures with some modifications. The novels written by this latter group have usually been classified as popular novels, and the novels written by the former group as feminist novels. The womanhood constructed in popular novels differs markedly from the womanhood constructed in the feminist novels.

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[6] This includes Persian novels written by women both in Iran and in the Diaspora. The literary production of Iranian emigrants since the late 1980s has expanded to such a degree, both quantitatively and qualitatively, that it is now impossible to discuss Persian literature, and thus the Persian novel, without taking into consideration the Persian literature and the Persian novel of the Iranian Diaspora (Sheyda, Forthcoming 2012; Sheyda 2009). However, it must be noted that the number of women novelists in the Diaspora is very limited.

[7] Talattof (1996, 1997).

[8] Talattof (1997: 531).

To summarize, the novels written by Iranian women during the last three decades can be divided into three categories: social novels, popular novels, and feminist novels. However, of the three, the feminist novel has occupied the largest space within the Persian literary world in the last three decades.

Social Novels

Social novels are usually written by the pre-Revolutionary generation of woman novelists or short story writers both in Iran and in the Diaspora, and are limited in number. Although, these novels are written by women, usually from the point of view of a female character or narrator, the focus is on socio-political issues rather than on gender issues or the situation of Iranian women. Social novels usually depict the differences and conflicts between different groups and individuals in a certain society, with each other or with the political establishment in a certain historical context. Socio-political tensions are the main focus of social novels, and it is the social milieu and historical context that shape the characters. In other word, the characters can be understood in relation to a specific social, political, and historical context.

Among the post-Revolutionary social novelists one can mention Simin Daneshvar with her *Jazire-ye sargardāni* (Wandering Island) (1993). Simin Daneshvar (1921–2012) was born in Shiraz and died in Tehran. In 1950, she married Jalal Al Ahmad, one of the most influential writers and social critics before the Revolution. This marriage came to influence her writing career deeply.

Daneshvar has published several short story collections and novels: *Ātashe khāmush* (The Quenched Fire) (Short story collection, 1948); *Shahri chon behesht* (A City Like Paradise) (Short story collection, 1961); *Sauvushun* (Mourners of Siavash)[9] (Novel, 1969); *Jazire-ye sargardāni* (Wandering Island) (Novel, 1993); and *Sārbān sargardān* (The Wandering Cameleer) (Novel, 2001). She has published several translations of modern world literature into Persian and a book about Jalal Al Ahmad titled *Ghorub-e Jalāl* (Jalal's Sunset) (1981).

Jazire-ye sargardāni follows Hasti, a twenty-six year old graduate of the College of Art in Tehran in the 1970s. Her Father, an old member of the opposition, is dead. Her mother is remarried to a dealer in economic contracts with Americans. Hasti is living with her grandmother. Although she does not approve of her mother's lifestyle, she cannot ignore her wishes; hence she agrees to meet the young man her mother introduces to her. This young man's name is Salim. He lives a Sufi-like life and is a member of an Islamic movement. Before meeting him, Hasti was in love with another young man, Morad, an atheist and a member of a non-religious guerrilla organization. The entire novel is about Hasti's uncertainty regarding her two loves, and ends with Hasti finally choosing Salim.

The novel can be interpreted as an allegory of the pre-Revolutionary Iranian society and the conflicting political discourses within it, which finally resulted in the victory of the Islamic discourse in the 1979 Revolution. In one scene, Salim's friend, Farhad, tells him that the Left has no chance in the Revolution as the people only trust the Islamic clergy:[10]

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[9] Translated into English as *A Persian Requiem*.

- ببین سلیم جان. دیگر حزب‌بازی فایده ندارد. چقدر به کارگر ها و دهقانها بگوییم بدبختند؟
مگر خودشان نمی‌دانند؟ چقدر بگوییم ما خوشبختتان می‌کنیم؟ به ما اعتماد ندارند، تنها به
آخوند اعتماد دارند. یکبار آقا شیخ سعید منبر رفت، نمی‌دانی چه اشکی از مردم گرفت.
حتی بکتاش و مرا به گریه انداخت.

- چی گفت؟

- از جنگ در راه خدا یعنی جهاد و شهادت حرف زد.[11]

– Dear Salim, there is no point to political parties. How many times can we tell the workers and peasants that they have a miserable life? They know that! How many times can we tell them that we are going to change their lives and make them happy? They do not trust us, they only trust the *mullas*. Once Sheykh Saeed was preaching. You cannot even imagine how he got the people to cry. Even Baktash and I burst into tears.
– What did he say?
– He talked about fighting for God, about *jihad* and martyrdom.

Salim tells his friend about his love for Hasti, and promises to convince Hasti that religion is the only alternative: [13]

- اما من متأسفانه عاشق شده‌ام.

- چرا متأسفانه؟

- دختری که عاشقش شده‌ام هزار و یک عیب شرعی و عرفی دارد. از نظر عقیدتی هم درست نقطهٔ مقابل من است.[12]

[...]

- می‌توانم او را رام کنم. مثل موم...

- اگر او تو ر ا رام کرد چی؟

[...]

- نه، او را متقاعد می‌کنم که غیر از راه دین راهی نیست.[13]

– Unfortunately, I am in love!
– Why unfortunately?
– The girl I am in love with has a thousand and one religious and non-religious weaknesses. Her ideological orientation is also totally different from mine.
– [...]
– [but] I can domesticate her. She is like wax…
– But what will happen if she manages to domesticate you?

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[10] All translations in the paper are mine.
[11] Daneshvar (1993: 165).
[12] Daneshvar (1993: 160).
[13] Daneshvar (1993: 166).

- [...]
- No, I will convince her that there is no other alternative than relying on religion.

Among other post-Revolutionary social novels one can mention *Bar bāl-e bād neshastan* (On the Wings of Wind) (Stockholm, 2002) by Shahrnush Parsipur; *Khāne-ye Edrisihā* (The House of Edrisis) (Tehran, 1991) by Ghazale Alizade, *Dar hazar* (At Home) (Los Angeles, 1987) by Mahshid Amirshahi; and *Bigāne-i dar man* (A Stranger Within Me) (Uppsala, 1993) by Shokuh Mirzadegi.

As mentioned earlier, Simin Daneshvar and Shahrnush Parsipur had already established themselves as novelists before the Islamic Revolution. Mahshid Amirshahi and Ghazale Alizade, on the other hand, were known as short story writers before the Revolution, and Shokuh Mirzadegi became established as novelist and short story writer only after the Revolution.

Popular Novels

Popular novels are mostly written by the post-Revolutionary generation of woman novelists in Iran. Before the Revolution, romantic popular novels written by men or women used to be published in women magazines. Sheyda summarizes some main features of the Persian post-Revolutionary popular novels: putting emphasis on Islamic morality, encouraging women to be chaste, depicting the life of the lower classes as enviable, justifying the predetermined social order, and espousing a strong belief in predetermined fate.[14] In popular novels, the time and the socio-political context are not important. What is essential is the moral message of the novel, which is considered to be justified beyond time and space. A very typical novel of this category is *Panjere* (The Window) (1992) by Fahime Rahimi.

Fahime Rahimi was born in 1952. Her first novel, *Bāzgasht be khoshbakhti* (A Return to Happiness), was published in 1990. Since then, she has published more than twenty-five popular novels, some of which are: *Otobus* (The Bus) (1993); *Sālhāyi ke bi to gozasht* (The Years Without You) (1994); *Eblis-e kuchak* (The Little Devil) (1995); *Pāyiz rā farāmush kon* (Forget the Autumn) (1995); *Yād-e to* (The Memory of You) (1998); *ʿEshq va khorāfāt* (Love and Superstition) (2001); *Marā yād ār* (Remember Me!) (2006); *Borji dar meh* (A Tower in the Fog) (2007); and *Roz-e kabud* (The Blue Rose) (2009). Most of Rahimi's novels have been reprinted several times and they are mostly read by women.

Panjere (The Window) is a love story. It begins with a middle-class family moving into a new house. They have two daughters, Mina and Mersede. In the new house, the window in the room of younger daughter, Mina, faces onto a window where a young man is living. Mina falls in love with the young man at first sight. It soon emerges that the young man is her literature teacher at her new school. The young man comes from a wealthy, but kind and humble family. After a while their families begin to socialize with each other. The young man also develops feelings for the girl, but none of them speak of their feelings for each other, as they are both very committed to the traditional moral norms. However, this silence ends when the young man marries his morally lax cousin. Having failed in love, the young girl, who is now working as a teacher, marries the father of one of her students just to be a mother to her student. Her husband dies after a couple of years. At last, the young teacher's wife commits suicide by jumping out of a window. With her death, there is no longer any obstacle to their union. They get married and it turns out that the young man had only married his cousin to save her from further moral decay.

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[14] Sheyda (2001: 86).

The entire novel emphasizes women's chastity, the importance of only expressing feelings and sexuality within controlled frames, the major role of a woman as being mother not a lover, the duty of human beings on the Earth, and despising the earthly world.

In the beginning of the novel, Mina's sister, Mersede, warns her to control her curiosity about the young man, to behave morally correct and stay away from the window. On one of those occasions, when she is looking for the young man through the window, she suddenly realizes that there is only one short step between chastity and a bad reputation:

> با خودم گفتم [...] مگر تو به مرسده قول ندادی که به پنجره نزدیک نشوی. مواظب باش از عفت تا بدنامی بیش از یک قدم فاصله نیست. مراقب باش تا به این پرتگاه سقوط نکنی از اندیشهٔ بدنامی و بدنام شدن بر خود لرزیدم و با عجله اتاق را ترک کردم.[15]

> I told myself […] didn't you promise Mersede to stay away from the window? Be careful, there is only one step between chastity and a bad reputation. Be careful, so that you do not fall into this abyss. At the bare thought of a bad reputation, I began to shudder and left the room hastily.

In one of the long moral lectures that the young teacher delivers for Mina, we read:

> ما همه برای آزمونی بزرگ خلق شده‌ایم [...] تو انسان خلق شده‌ای و در وجودت مثل تمام انسانها عواطف و احساسات به ودیعه گذاشته شده است و باید از آنها استفاده کنی و انسان باشی انسان سازنده و مثمر ثمر. تو خلق شده‌ای تا که مادر گردی و گردونهٔ زندگی را با نسلی که از خود برجای می‌گذاری بگردانی آیا هدف داری این جهان را قبول داری؟[16]

> We are all created for a great final test […]. You have been created as human being, and like other human beings, you have been given feelings and affections that you have to use to be a better human being; a constructive and fruitful human being. You have been created to become a mother and stand for the continuity of the cycle of life by leaving behind a new generation. Do you believe in a higher goal behind the creation of this world?

Among the other post-Revolutionary popular novels written by women one can mention *Hekāyat-e ruzegār* (The Story of Our Time) (1994) by Faride Golbu; *Diānā ke bud* (Who Was Diana?) (1994) by Zahra Zavvarian; *Bāmadād-e khomār* (Drunkard Morning) (1995) by Fattane Haj Seyyed Javadi; *Chenār-e Dālbeti* (Dalbeti Plane Tree) (1992) by Mansure Sharifzade; *Khushehā-ye ranj* (The Grapes of Suffering) (1999) by Nasrin Sameni; *Yaldā va rahāyi* (Yalda and Liberation) (2000) by Mahkame Rahimzade; *Qesse-ye zendegi* (The Life Story) (2001) by Setare Nasirian; and *Taqdir-e shum* (The Wretched Fate) (2007) by Maryam Jafari.

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[15] Rahimi (1992:12–13).
[16] Rahimi (1992:100).

Feminist Novels

Feminist novels are mostly written by the post-Revolutionary generation of woman novelists and short story writers both in Iran and in the Diaspora. The number of feminist novelist in the Diaspora is limited. As a matter of fact, the Iranian women in the Diaspora have mostly been involved in writing poetry or feminist studies. It is hardly necessary to say that the feminist novels show great sensitivity towards gender issues. They are almost always written from the point of view of a female character or narrator.

The main feature separating the feminist novels from the social novels is that in the feminist novels, the historical and socio-political context is either absent or a secondary issue. The feminist novels focus on the differences between men and women, their two separate worlds, and on women's feelings. The feminist novels are dependent on the opposition between the two sexes. In these novels, men are usually present just as a means to highlight the differences between the two sexes. Most of these novels could have simply been written by any women living in any big city in the Middle East. As in the popular novels, time and space are not decisive for shaping the characters or plotting the novel. A typical Persian post-Revolutionary feminist novel is *Parande-ye man* (My Bird) (2002) by Fariba Vafi.

Fariba Vafi was born in 1962. Her first published book was the short story collection, *Dar ᶜomq-e sahne* (In Depth of the Stage) (1996). *Parande-ye man* (My Bird) (2002), her first novel, won two highly prestigious Persian literary awards, the Golshiri Award and the Yalda Literary Award, for best novel 2002. She has published several other novels and short story collections: *Hattā vaqti mikhandim* (Even When We Are Laughing) (Short story collection, 1999); *Tarlān* (Tarlan) (Novel, 2003), *Royā-ye tabbat* (Dream of Tibet) (Novel, 2005); *Dar rāh-e Vilā* (On the Way to Vila Avenue) (Short story collection, 2007); *Rāzi dar kuchehā* (A Mystery in Alleys) (Novel, 2008); *Hame-ye ofoq* (The Entire Horizon) (Short story collection, 2010); and *Māh kāmel mishavad* (When It Becomes a Full Moon) (Novel, 2010).

Parande-ye man (My Bird) follows the life of a young woman living in a poor neighbourhood in Tehran, together with her husband, Amir, and her two children. Amir believes that there is no future for him and his family in Iran. To work in Baku, Amir leaves his wife and their two children alone in Tehran for a time, but he dreams of emigrating to Canada. The narrator, Amir's wife, is a simple everyday woman who is occupied with her family, her little home, and her relationship with Amir. She is not interested in moving to another country.

The narrator feels lonely having a husband obsessed by his dream of leaving Iran for Canada. Physically, he is at home, but mentally he is away, neglecting his wife's feelings and needs. He neither sees nor hears her. He is living in his own world.

This life in loneliness and silence reminds the woman of her childhood in silence with a strict father and a bitter mother. She is not particularly in love with her husband, but she is not strong enough to leave him either. So she continues to live with him, while keeping silent about her true feelings about Amir. She betrays him in her dreams:

امیر خبر ندارد که روزی صد بار به او خیانت می‌کنم؛ وقتی که زیرشلواری‌اش به همان حالتی که درآورده وسط اتاق است. وقتی توی جمع آنقدر سرش گرم است که متوجه من نیست [...]. وقتی مرا علت ناکامی‌هایش به حساب می‌آورد [...]. خبر ندارد که روزی صد بار [...] از این زندگی بیرون می‌روم [...] به جاهایی می‌روم که امیر خیالش را هم نمی‌کند. آن وقت با پشیمانی زنی توبه‌کار، در تاریکی شبی مثل امشب دوباره به خانه پیش امیر باز می‌گردم.[17]

> Amir doesn’t know that I betray him one hundred times a day; when I pick up his pyjamas left on the floor, precisely as he has taken them off; when at our parties, he is so busy with other people that he doesn’t even think of me […]; when he looks at me as the reason behind all his failures. He doesn’t know that I leave this marriage one hundred times a day […] for places that he cannot even imagine. Then, in the darkness of a night like this, I return to this house and to Amir like a penitent woman.

In another scene, having put her head on Amir’s chest, she lets him caress her hair while thinking that she is really tired of him:

به امیر نزدیک می‌شوم و سرم را روی سینه‌اش می‌گذارم. زیادی سفت است. سرم را کمی پایین‌تر می‌آورم. آمیر موهایم را نوازش می‌کند [...]. امیر به خیالش هم نمی‌رسد که اینقدر از او سیر شده باشم.[18]

> I come closer to Amir and put my head on his chest. His chest is too hard. I put my head a bit lower. Amir caresses my hair […]. He cannot even imagine how tired I am of him.

As a typical feminist novel, *Parande-ye man* (My Bird), is indifferent to the historical and socio-political context. The characters can be understood through their daily actions. The world of the novel is limited to the narrator’s home and family.

The list of Persian post-Revolutionary feminist novels written by women is long. Among these novels one can mention: *Jensiat-e gomshode* (The Lost Gender) (Tehran, 2000) By Farkhonde Aqayi; *Āsmān khāli nist* (The Sky Is Not Empty) (Tehran, 2003) by Shiva Arastuyi; *Engār gofte budi Leyli* (As if You Had Said Leyli) (Tehran, 2000) by Sepide Shamlu; *Man va Vis* (Me and Vis) (Tehran, 1998) by Faride Razi; *Cherāgh-hā rā man khāmush mikonam* (I will Turn off the Lights) (Tehran, 2001) by Zoya Pirzad; *Che kasi bāvar mikonad Rostam?* (Who Believes that Rostam?) (Tehran, 2003) by *Ruhangiz sharifian*; and *Shāli be derāzā-ye jāde-ye abrisham* (A Shawl as Long as the Silk Road) by Mahasti Shahrokhi (Stockholm 1999).[19]

It must be mentioned that there are a few novels, like *Negarān nabāsh* (Don’t Worry!) (Tehran, 2009) by Mahsa Mohebali and *Ehtemālan gom shode-am* (I Am Probably Lost) (Tehran, 2009) by Sara Salar, that represent a new approach towards gender questions and the socio-political context. Although they depict the crisis in the relationship between the two sexes within a chaotic socio-political context, these novels are not dependent on the opposition between the two sexes. The female characters in these two novels are no longer depicted only as victims of men and a patriarchal society. They are not solely shaped in relation to the other sex. This new category demands a study of its own.

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[17] Vafi (2002: 41–42).

[18] Vafi (2002: 59).

[19] Republished in Iran in 2005.

Conclusion

To summarize, the Persian post-Revolutionary novels written by women reflect different reactions to the Islamic Revolution, the aftermath of the Revolution, and its consequences, and include different themes and subjects. In the social novels, men and women are equally engaged in the challenges and conflicts of their time. Popular novels have been used as a medium to justify the limited role of women in a male dominate world. Feminist novels have been used as a tool for expressing dissatisfaction with the patriarchal and traditional structures and institutions. Showalter identifies three phases in the writing of British women novelists: 1) the first phase of "*imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles"; 2) the second phase of "*protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy"; and 3) the third phase of "*self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity". Showalter suggests *Feminine*, *Feminist*, and *Female* as appropriate terms for these three phases.[20] With the exception of social novels, Showalter's *Feminine*, *Feminist,* and *Female* novels more or less correspond to the categories of novels written by Iranian women as presented in this paper.

As for the aesthetics of the novel, Iranian women authors have also tested different forms of novel writing. All of these novels, however, have been nothing but the voice of women authors who had found a suitable and possible way to demonstrate their active presence in a stormy period and to announce how they see life.

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[20] Showalter (1977: 13).

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Qualified “heterodoxy” in a 17th century Ḥurūfī *muḳaddime*

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Abstract

The contribution discusses a previously unpublished Ottoman Ḥurūfī prose text, the “Preface (*muḳaddime*) to the theology of Sayyid Nesīmī” (dated 1623/1624). The text reflects a variety of Ḥurūfī doctrine that is based on a system of twenty-nine “words” (*lafẓ*). It is interpreted as belonging to a late form of Ḥurūfism, which both in content and practice diverged from the original Ḥurūfī sect of the 14th–15th centuries. The *muḳaddime*’s particular emphasis on ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*, *namāz*) is interpreted as an effort to address the dominating conservative circles of the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, the *muḳaddime* is overtly critical of the Ottoman political system, including the sultan himself. In this regard, it reveals the co-operation of mystic currents with the political opposition. In a broader perspective, it is contextualized with the almost contemporary treatise of Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg.

Keywords: Islam, heterodoxy, mysticism, ritual prayer, Hurufism, crisis of the Ottoman Empire, political opposition, history, 17th century, Ottoman manuscripts

0. Note on transcription and languages

The basic language of the text investigated in this contribution is Ottoman. However, the text is interspersed with passages in Persian and Arabic. No established uniform and coherent system exists for transcribing all these three languages at the same time. As the extant transcription systems for Ottoman, Persian, and Arabic sometimes use identical symbols for different graphemes and/or phonemes or different symbols for identical signs and/or phonemes, this might lead to confusion in the present multilingual approach. Hence, in order to avoid any ambiguity resulting from transcription, quotations from Ottoman, Persian, and Arabic will be rendered according to the following unified system. It is based on the Ottoman system introduced by Kreutel, with some refinements adapted from the Omniglot website.[1]

The vowels of the three languages will be added according to the pronunciation of Ottoman, Classical/Modern Standard Arabic and Modern Persian. As the main language of the text is Ottoman, quotations are not marked if they are from this language. Change into Arabic or Persian will be marked by [Arab.] and [Pers.], respectively. If a return from these languages into Ottoman occurs, then [Ottom.] will be used.

1. Introduction

The Ḥurūfiyya religion revealed by Fażlullāh Astarābādī (ca. 1340–1393/1394)[2]

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[1] See http://www.omniglot.com/writing/persian.htm [accessed April 13, 2006], Kreutel 1965: XIV–XX.

[2] The majority of researchers agree on his year of death as being 796 A. H. (starts August 28, 1393, ends October 26, 1394): Ritter 1954: 8, Bausani 1979: 600, Gölpınarlı 1991: 733, Araslı 1998: 251 and 253, Bashir 2005: 37, 175. For deviating assessments, cf. Divshali/Luft 1980: 18 and 23, Halm 1988: 99, Roemer 1989: 80 and Schimmel 1990: 221. See also Huart/Tevfiq 1909: XIII. For his year of birth see Bausani 1979: 600, Gölpınarlı 1991: 733, Bashir 2002: 171.

Unified transcription system for Ottoman, Persian and Arabic

Letter	Ottoman	Persian	Arabic
ا	ā, a; nothing or ’	ā, a; nothing or ’	ā; nothing or ’
ب	b	b	b
پ	p	p	-
ت	t	t	t
ث	s̱	s̱	ṯ
ج	ǧ	ǧ	ǧ
چ	č	č	-
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ
خ	ḫ	ḫ	ḫ
د	d	d	d
ذ	ẕ	ẕ	ḏ
ر	r	r	r
ز	z	z	z
ژ	ž	ž	-
س	s	s	s
ش	š	š	š
ص	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ
ض	ż	ż	ż
ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ
ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ
ع	ʿ	ʿ	ʿ
غ	ġ	ġ	ġ
ف	f	f	f
ق	ḳ	ḳ	ḳ
ك	k, ŋ, y/ǧ, g	k	k
گ	g	g	-
ل	l	l	l
م	m	m	m
ن	n	n	n
ه	h	h	h
و	u, ū, o, ü; v	u, o, ū, ou; v	ū; v
ی	i, ï, ė, ī; y	i, ī; y	ī; y

and the more or less formalized religious movements that germinated from it[3] have been scrutinized from basically two different disciplinary angles. On the one hand, theologians and historians of religion have placed emphasis on the particular interpretation of the Islamic tradition proposed by the Ḥurūfīs.[4] On the other hand, their activities have been placed in their broader historical and social context without penetrating deeply into Ḥurūfī theology.[5] To a certain degree, both scholarly approaches have always interacted. In fact, the necessity to connect the religious teachings of Fażlullāh and the Ḥurūfīs of at least the first century after his initial revelation[6] with their social and political environment is dictated by the very fact that they both had political ambitions and were active in the political sphere. The Ḥurūfīs' attempts to convert outstanding political leaders such as Timur, the Ḳaraḳoyunlu ruler Ğahānšāh, and Meḥmed the Conqueror, as well as the overall tragic outcome of their political endeavors bear witness to the inseparability of the Ḥurūfīs' doctrine from their social and political action. However, despite the fact that Ḥurūfism was from the outset a political religion and that many modern scholars have dwelt on the societal, political, and economic causes and effects of its emergence, the fundamentally important question of the relationship between its complex theology and the historical realities in which it was embedded still remains to be defined for each stage of Ḥurūfī history. To some extent, this is due to a lack of sufficient source material, or to contradictory statements in the sources. An example of a failure to define the nature of this relationship precisely is Fażlullāh's attempt to convert Timur. According to one theory, Fażlullāh's aim in doing so was to stop the injustice inflicted by the Mongol ruler upon the people, i.e. he is ascribed a political motive.[7] However, according to the account of Fażlullāh's contemporary Ibn Ḥağar al-ʿAskalānī (1372–1448), the real reason for Fażlullāh's execution on the orders of Timur by his son Mīrānšāh was the innovative religious teaching of the Ḥurūfī leader.[8] Certainly, the reasons for the ambiguities in the interpretation of the Ḥurūfiyya movement lie both in its own nature and in that of the sources it has left behind. Having been a relatively small and marginal organization, which was always persecuted by the ruling religious-political establishment, their motivations and attitudes are incompletely reflected in sources written by non-Ḥurūfīs. As to the Ḥurūfī sources themselves, at least in the first century of Ḥurūfī history these are almost exclusively concerned with religious questions that bear no relationship with the social and political realities of their time.[9] However, it would be premature to deduce from the silence of the Ḥurūfīs' own texts on these matters that they were not driven by political and social motives,[10] because the limitation of the Ḥurūfī texts to theological topics need not correspond to a limitation of their interests, but may be the consequence of a deliberate effort to gain acceptance first and foremost on the theological level.

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[3] For general information about the Ḥurūfīyya religion, see Ritter 1954, Gölpınarlı 1964, Gölpınarlı 1965, Binswanger 1974, Bausani 1979, Ḫayāwī 1379 H., Bashir 2005: 37, 175, Heß 2009: 49–78, Zelyut 2010: 169–178. Also still very useful despite its age is Huart/Tevfīq 1909.

[4] See for instance Kürkçüoğlu 1985, Bashir 2002, Bashir 2005.

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[5] For instance, Akçam 1995: 59–61. Cf. Araslı 1972, Guluzade 1973, Ibragimov 1973.

[6] There is disagreement amongst scholars as to the dating of the "manifestation of Divine Greatness" (*ẓohūr-e kibriyā*) in the person of Fażlollāh, which is usually regarded as the founding date of the Ḥurūfī religion. According to Bausani, it happened in 788 A. H. (starts February 2, 1386, ends January 21, 1387) or 789 A. H. (starts January 22, 1387, ends January 10, 1388), see Bausani 1979: 600. Cf. Gölpınarlı 1991: 733, who calls 1386 the year in which Fażlullāh started spreading his ideas. On the other hand, Bashir claims that the *ẓohūr-e kibriyā* took place in the month of Ramaḍān of the year 775 A. H. (starts February 14, 1373, ends March 15, 1374; Bashir 2005: 174). On the periodization of early Ḥurūfī history, see below p. 157.

[7] Usluer 2009: 20.

[8] Usluer 2009: 20.

[9] Usluer 2009: 17.

[10] Cf. Usluer 2009: 17.

At this point, it is suitable to open a short parenthesis in order to illustrate the scope and topicality of this question. There is an obvious parallel between the violent polemics surrounding Ḥurūfism in the Middle Ages and ongoing debates about the origins of Islam. Such a comparison is appropriate for a number of reasons. Firstly, the current discussions, both among those who call themselves "believing Muslims" and those who do not, refer to exactly the same textual, legendary, and historical material as that taken up by the Ḥurūfīs, i.e. the Koran, the *aḥādīṯ*, and other constituents of early Islamic tradition.[11] Secondly, the essence of the pivotal question is the same in both cases, namely to define the relationship between a religious system of reference demanding absolute and unconditional submission and the world lying outside the adherents of this system. Thirdly, sadly, and due to both of the preceding reasons, the Ḥurūfic episode of the 14th/15th centuries resembles the debates around Islam and Islamism at the turn of the 20th/21st century in their being accompanied by widespread outbursts of violence. From these resemblances follows not only that the history of Ḥurūfism can potentially be viewed in terms of some premises similar to those formulated in the contemporary debates on Islam, but also that this historical episode in turn can teach us something about Islam in the modern world.

It is safe to say that the above-mentioned fundamental question of the relationship between the social and political aspects of the Ḥurūfī movement and its doctrine has not yet been addressed as such by modern scholarship. Soviet research has, it is true, given a set of stereotyped answers within the framework of Marxist-Leninist theory, viewing it as a "pantheist" movement involved in a struggle against feudalism.[12] Apart from the fact that this ideological perspective is not shared by the most other (i.e. non-Marxist) scholars it suffers from a tendency to reduce the religious aspect to secondary importance. Nevertheless, the deliberately materialist interpretation of the Ḥurūfī heritage introduced by Soviet scholarship still has persisting echoes in Turkey.[13] For instance, the Turkish sociologist and historian Taner Akçam subsumes Ḥurūfism under the umbrella category of "social opposition movements." Although he admits that this current possessed a certain "religious character," he nevertheless treats it first and foremost as a social movement.[14] In contrast, most of the authors quoted above that chiefly dwell on the religious dimension of Ḥurūfism fail to relate this information to the specific political and social circumstances in which it was articulated. In sum, there is a need to study the interaction between the religious and the socio-political aspects of the Ḥurūfī movement.

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[11] For a scholarly evaluation of these debates, see Nagel 2008 and Hagen 2009.

[12] For examples of Soviet interpretations of Ḥurūfism one may refer to Araslı 1972, Guluzade 1973, and Ibragimov 1973.

[13] Cf. Usluer 2009: 19.

[14] The quotes are from a chapter in which Akçam discusses a Ḥurūfī episode from 15th century Rumelia (Akçam 1995: 61): "It is a common property of all medieval societies that the movements of social resistance are of religious character. […] Beyond being *only* a religious belief, these [i.e. the movements of social resistance – M. H.] have also developed as *a form of social life*." (*Toplumsal muhalefet hareketlerinin dinî karakterde olması tüm Ortaçağ toplumlarının ortak özelliğidir*. […] *Bunlar* salt *bir dinî inanç olmanın ötesinde,* toplumsal bir yaşam biçimi *olarak da gelişmişlerdir*.; Akçam 1995: 59, emphasis by M. H.).

This article tries to contribute to this debate by looking at a late Ḥurūfī text from the 17th century. The importance of this Ottoman manuscript document lies in the insight it offers into the development of Ḥurūfi ideas long after the phase of open missionary activities had ended, in which the Ḥurūfi believers had tried to erect their own kind of *politeia*.[15] It illustrates the evolution of the original, radical, and millenarian religion into a slightly different system, which may also offer a bridge towards understanding how and why Ḥurūfi thought has survived, again changing its shape in many ways, until the present, as for instance among the Alevi community of Turkey.

2. About the text

The text discussed here is previously unpublished. It is contained in a manuscript kept in Istanbul's Süleymaniye Library.[16] The text is written in Ottoman, but with some insertions in Arabic, and, considerably less frequently, Persian. It gives its own title as *kitāb Muḳaddimat Kalām Sayyid Nasīmī*.[17] This can be translated as "Introduction to the theology of Seyyid [ʻİmādeddīn] Nesimi." According to the colophon, the writing of the manuscript was completed in 1033 A. H. (begins October 25, 1623, ends October 13, 1624).[18] On the last page of the manuscript, the author mentions his own first name, which is probably to be read as *Veysī*/*Veysi* (with *Veysi* being a phonetic alternative to *Veysī*) or perhaps *Vīsī*/*Vīsi*. The reading *Veysī*/*Veysi* seems more likely as it rhymes in one place with *Ḳaysi*.[19] The author ascribes to himself the attributes *bende* and *ḳul* "slave," which together with his interest in things concerning the *pādišāh* (which can be understood as referring to the Ottoman sultan) and the fact that he is to act "if ordered" (*fermān olïnursa*) may, but need not, point to his belonging to the Janissary corps.[20]

The text is written in prose and includes no longer extracts from poems, neither by Nesīmī nor any other poet, but only occasional verses (or rather rhymed lines resembling verses) strewn into the text for special rhetorical effect.[21] The style is quite colloquial and to a large extent free from complicated Arabic or Persian expressions. It is true that it does contain quite a significant number of religious, mystical, and Ḥurūfī technical terms in Arabic and Persian. But most of these are explained (or even translated) in the text itself. Also, the *muḳaddime* is fraught with many repetitions and pleonasms, which betray a strong didactic intention. For instance, a particular saying attributed to the prophet Muḥammad is presented twice in the initial section,[22] the story about the reduction of the number of obligatory prayers from fifty to five is told twice,[23] and longer Arabic passages are provided with an Ottoman translation introduced by *ya'nī* "this means… ."[24] This style makes the text recognizable as not belonging to any representative or official text genre (such as for instance *münše'āt*, official Ottoman chancellery prose), but as having been created for informal use.

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[15] On the open missionary period cf. below p. 157.

[16] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461.

[17] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 1r. The pagination is my own, as the manuscript does not contain one.

[18] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 48r, l. 16f.

[19] See Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 48r, l. 8–10.

[20] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 48r, l. 3, 10–12. – On *ḳul*/*bende*, cf. Pakalın 1983, vol. 1: 203, s. v. *bende* and vol. 2: 314, s.v. *kul*.

[21] E.g. Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 48r, l. 8f.

[22] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 1r and 3r. (*nuzila'l-Ḳur'ānu ʻalā sabʻati'l- ḥarf…*).

The writing is not ornate, but regular and legible, which reveals that the scribe had a certain degree of experience. The writer (and possibly, the author) has a good, but imperfect command of the orthographic rules of Ottoman. This indicates that he probably does not belong to the *'ulemā* class, and certainly not to the top-class *münše'āt* writers who worked for the *pādišāh*. For instance, the obligatory marking of the 3rd person possessive suffix *murādï* "its purpose" is omitted,[25] obviously as a result of a confusion with the identically pronounced *iżāfe* vowel. Apparently, the writer supplemented his incomplete knowledge of the orthographic rules by conjectures, which in part seem to be based on hearing.

3. The first section of the *muḳaddime* in the light of the Ḥurūfiyya's historical evolution

The *muḳaddime*'s introductory section (fol. 1r-top to 4r) sets out some essentials of Ḥurūfī doctrine. In particular, it focuses on the importance of the first Quran surah (*Fātiḥa*). An explanation of the special Ḥurūfī meaning of the *Fātiḥa* with its seven *āyāt* (verses) is given which includes repeated references to the practice of the Muslim ritual prayer (in Arabic, *ṣalāt*). Already in the fifth line of the text (the title and a formulaic *besmele* line being included in the counting) the Arabic saying "There is no ritual prayer without the Opening (*Fātiḥa*) of the (Sacred) Book (i.e. the Quran)" is quoted.[26] In addition, the Arabic word for the Muslim ritual prayer is mentioned three more times until the beginning of fol. 4r.[27] However, it is not before fol. 4r that the more commonly used synonym of *ṣalāt*, *namāz*, is used for the first time.[28] This change of vocabulary marks a transition from the more formal and sublime realm of theological interpretation (with its characteristic "sacred" language Arabic) to everyday religious practice. For in contrast to *ṣalāt*, which is typical of expert and erudite language, *namāz* is the Ottoman (and still Turkish) colloquial default term for "ritual prayer," most notably in the phraseological verb (Ottoman) *namāz ḳïl-*/ (Turkish) *namaz kıl-* "to perform the ritual prayer." Even if *namāz* is said to be of Iranian etymological origin,[29] it can nevertheless be regarded as the standard designation for the ritual prayer, as no genuinely Turkic word is used with the same frequency in Ottoman. On the argumentative level, the desire to link up Ḥurūfī doctrine with the established everyday religious practice in the Ottoman Empire is evident from the textual reference to the seventeen *raka'āt* (or ritual prayer sequences) in connection with the (ordinary, not pertaining to the ill or to travelers) *namāz*.[30] For *seventeen* is also the number that the introductory section of the *muḳaddime* claims for the so-called "separated letters" (*ḥurūf-i muḳaṭṭaʿāt*), which are an essential component of Ḥurūfī theology.[31] In a historical perspective, this particular pattern of argumentation is typical of a late period of Ḥurūfī history. It is less emphasized in the initial phases of the religion. In order to illustrate the difference, it seems useful to briefly recapitulate these early stages.

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[23] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 4r, l. 6–8 and 14–16.

[24] For instance, Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol.1r, l. 13 and fol. 2v, l. 2.

[25] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 4v, l. 2.

[26] *Lā ṣalāta illā bi-fātiḥati'l-kitāb* (Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 1r, l.5).

[27] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 1r, l. 4; fol. 1v, l. 14 and 15.

[28] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 4r, l. 6.

[29] Cf. Nişanyan 2009: 442, s.v. *namaz*.

The initial period of Ḥurūfī history can be termed "openly missionary." It started with the original revelation of Fażlullāh (1373/1374 or 1386/1387).[32] This phase lasted for about three quarters of a century, after which the last attempts of Ḥurūfī propagandists to convert political leaders failed. Probably the last documented case in point is a Ḥurūfī teacher who was burnt at the stake in the town of Edirne after trying to convert the Ottoman prince Meḥmed (the future conqueror of Constantinople) in 848 A. H. (begins April 20, 1444, ends April 8, 1445).[33] Around this time lies the end of the *open mission* phase of Ḥurūfī history and of all attempts to gain for Ḥurūfism a status similar to that of the established brands of Islam. Those adherents of Ḥurūfism who survived after this date probably did not entirely give up on the prospect of gaining political support for their ideas. But as a matter of fact, open proselytizing activities gave way to other, less extroverted, forms of transmission of Ḥurūfī thought. These were by necessity no longer dedicated to conquering a political foundation for the religion but were limited to attempts at spreading its ideas. For instance, we know that even after the execution of the last openly missionizing Ḥurūfī leader, Ḥurūfī ideas continued to be passed on by ʿAbdolmağīd b. Firišta (Firišteoğlu). He died in 874 A. H. (1469/1470) and was a disciple of Bāyezīd, who in turn had been instructed by Fażlullāh's pupil Sayyed Šams od-Dīn.[34]

The above periodization uses the Ḥurūfī believers' own actions as a criterion. Alternatively, Fatih Usluer has suggested a periodization that adds a geographical component. For him, the first phase of Ḥurūfī history ends with the death of Fażlullāh (i.e. at the latest in 1394) and the arrival of such figures as ʿAlī al-Aʿlā and Nesīmī on Anatolian and Syrian soil (around the year 1400).[35] According to Usluer, the second phase, which began in the six years bracketed by these two dates, lasted until at least the 17th century and therefore encompasses the manuscript discussed here.[36] However, there are two serious drawbacks to this periodization attempt. Firstly, while it does make sense to place a caesura after the death of Fażlullāh, who was a unique and irreplaceable figure and whose disappearance changed everything for the Ḥurūfī community, Usluer's geographical and chronological criterion (extending the mission to Anatolia and Syria) is of less obvious importance. For it is difficult to discern a radical shift in Ḥurūfī activity or doctrine after the time it reached Anatolia and Syria. Secondly and more importantly, Usluer's periodization is not elaborate enough to grasp the profound and lasting change which affected the Ḥurūfī movement with the end of the open mission. The important change from an external mission with the aim of assuming political power to mere spiritual activity is not reflected in Usluer's periodization at all. The reason for this is obviously a certain Turkish nationalistic bias of his, as he states that both in the case of the Ḥurūfī propagandist Refīʿī (early 15th century) and later Ḥurūfī movements "the only way to spread Ḥurūfism in this new geographical area went through this philosophy [i.e. Ḥurūfism – M. H.] being expressed in Turkic/Turkish."[37] Accordingly, to his mind the fact that from around 1400 Ḥurūfism became more and more firmly integrated into the Turkic-speaking world is more important than the shift from a missionizing to a more introverted religion. However, the end of Ḥurūfī missionary activity is key to understanding the Ḥurūfism of the *muḳaddime*. Therefore, the historical periodization system mentioned first conforms more closely to historical reality than Usluer's.

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[30] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 4r, l. 11f.

[31] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 3v, l. 7.

[32] See above footnote 6.

[33] Babinger 1959: 34f.; Bausani 1979: 600.

[34] Huart/Tevfīq 1909: XIX.

[35] Usluer 2009: 9. The fact that this is not an exact periodization but one with an inherent discrepancy of up to six years is not discussed by Usluer.

[36] Usluer 2009: 9.

Our knowledge of the time between the end of the open mission in the middle of the 15th century and the writing of the *muḳaddime* in 1623/1624 is only fragmentary. This is largely due to the clandestine status into which the surviving Ḥurūfīs were forced after their political projects had been thwarted. Therefore, we cannot exactly trace the evolutionary stages that lie between these two dates. What is clear from the text of the *muḳaddime*, though, is that the Ḥurūfism presented therein is on the one hand entirely different from the open missionary one of the founding phase, but on the other hand also somewhat different from a pure transmission of spiritual knowledge. The insistence of the *muḳaddime* on explaining the correct meaning of ritual prayer, for example, betrays a preoccupation with one of the central aspects of public Muslim religion in the Ottoman Empire, which means that the aim of the text is primarily to effect a gradual change of opinion and not to convert directly. Ottoman intellectual history had up to this point been marked by two opposing interpretations of the Muslim heritage. Greatly simplified, one may term the opposing sides as "formalists" versus "antinomists."[38] For the formalists, who had become politically dominant by the middle of the 16th century, visible religious practices, such as going to the mosque on Fridays, praying in public, using prayer beads, performing the pilgrimage to Mecca, etc., were of paramount importance. In contrast, the antinomists relativized the significance of such outward religious manifestations or discarded them altogether. Not rarely, they even went so far as to disregard formalist interdictions, e.g. regarding the consumption of alcohol. In this context, the *muḳaddime*, written in a time of formalist dominance, seems to articulate a position which can be characterized as outwardly assimilatory and crypto-missionary. The assimilatory aspect of the initial section of the *muḳaddime* is constituted by the fact that it addresses the topic of "the five daily ritual prayers,"[39] which is one of the themes of fundamental importance to the formalists and perhaps even one of their most distinctive features vis-à-vis the antinomists. To a formalist Muslim reader, the *muḳaddime* may therefore have appeared as a perfectly legitimate treatise on one of the tenets of the ruling (in the truest sense of the word) religion, and as implying no "heterodox" deviation whatsoever. On the other hand, the crypto-missionary element appears in the double sense of the number "17," being both the regular (formalist) number of times of daily *raka'āt* and a magical Ḥurūfī figure (at least according to the *muḳaddime*). Instead of openly challenging the ruling opinion (as the Ḥurūfīs did for instance in Nesīmī's times), the *muḳaddime* author adopts it, but then adds a new meaning to it.

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[37] *Refi'î örneğinde olduğu gibi, bu yeni coğrafyada Hurufiliğin yayılmasının tek yolu felsefenin Türkçe ifade edilmesinden geçmekteydi*. (Usluer 2009: 9). The term *Türkçe* may refer both to Turkish and to other Turkic languages.

[38] For a more thorough account of these intellectual currents (but with different terminology), see Ze'evi 2006. Cf. Heß 2008.

[39] *Beš vaḳt … namāz* (Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 4r, l. 6–10).

In sum, if one compares the way Muslim ritual prayer is discussed in the *muḳaddime* to the open missionary phase of Ḥurūfī history, one can discern a marked change in the Ḥurūfīs' attitudes towards their audience. The classical missionary pattern – a small group believing themselves to have privileged access to an alleged transcendental truth in opposition to the others – is replaced by one in which the participants, in this case the author(s) of *muḳaddime* and its addressees or potential readers are more integrated. They are also more interactive, with the Ḥurūfīs adapting themselves to the ruling religious climate and toning down their activity from attempts at persuasion to more or less surreptitiously inserting elements of their belief system into the mainstream religious culture. There is a phenomenological change from the Ḥurūfism of the early stages to the one evident in the *muḳaddime*.

4. The *muḳaddime* and the decline of Ḥurūfīsm

At least in the Ottoman and Turkish context, the latest Ḥurūfī texts stem from the 17th century.[40] This means that despite its title the *muḳaddime* belongs to the very last texts of its genre. Against the background of the overall decline of Ḥurūfism, the overtly assimilatory and only secretly missionary tendency of the above-discussed section of the *muḳaddime* can also be interpreted as a symptom of the decline of Ḥurūfism first as a missionary religion and then as a discernible religious movement altogether. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries Ottoman Empire with its thoroughly fixed religious landscape, openly proselytizing in favor of a dissident religious opinion was an unpromising enterprise, in contrast to 14th and 15th century Iran and Azerbaijan with their political vacuum and instability.

5. The *muḳaddime* and its Ottoman context

As to the contextualization of the muḳaddime within Ottoman history, its copying year already offers an important clue. The *terminus post quem* of the copying, October 24, 1623, situates the work in a time when the Ottoman Empire was living through its worst crisis since the interregnum (*Fetret Devri*), which had ensued after Timur's invasion at the beginning of the 15th century. However, in contrast to the *Fetret* crisis, this second decline was not so much due to external factors, but primarily to internal ones. Widespread corruption, economic weakness, and a series of weak rulers such as Selīm II the Drunkard (1566–1574), Muṣṭafā I (1617 and again 1622–1623), and ʿOs̱mān II (1618–1622) had brought the still impressive Ottoman rule to a point where the signs of decay began to be recognized even in the interior. The most famous critique of the overall situation is a treatise (*risāle*) published by Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg in 1631.[41] If the author of the *muḳaddime* indeed belonged to the Janissary corps (as is possible but not proven), this would constitute proof that criticism of the empire's situation came from at least two different layers of the elite at that point of time, for Ḳoči Beg's anti-Janissary attitude[42] leaves no doubt that he did not belong to the corps himself. As stated above, we cannot be absolutely certain about the sense of the terms *ḳul* and *bende* in the *muḳaddime*, so this hypothesis cannot be verified.

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[40] According to Usluer 2009: 9, 10, 12.

At least as regards its contents, the *muḳaddime* can indeed be compared with Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg's critique, which it in fact anticipates. For instance, the *muḳaddime* stigmatizes "the temptation and depravity which manifests itself in every *pādišāh* of the age" (*her pādišāh-ï zamānda ẓuhūr ėden fitne vü fesād*).[43] As *pādišāh* is a standard term for referring to the Ottoman sultan, the addressee of this stark reproach must be the sultan himself. Given the dating of the manuscript and the historical circumstances, this might be Muṣṭafā I or ʿOs̱mān II. However, it is less likely to be the sultan who came to power after Muṣṭafā I in the very year the *muḳaddime* was written down, i.e. Murād IV (1623–1640), even if this is theoretically possible. Firstly, it would be highly unusual for a sultan to be attacked in such strong terms less than a year after his accession. Secondly and more importantly, we know that Murād IV, in contrast to his above-mentioned predecessors, was a strong and successful ruler. Among other things, he accomplished the conquest of Baghdad in 1638. In fact, one of the supposed reasons for Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg addressing his *risāle* to this new sultan was the hope that Murād IV would differ from his predecessors.[44]

Independent of the question whether the author of the *muḳaddime* was a member of the Janissary corps and which of the Ottoman sultans might have been the target of his criticism, the text reveals an affinity between certain Ottomans who were inclined towards Ḥurūfī thought and the political opposition. In fact, this offers a fresh perspective on what has been said about the mitigation and assimilation of Ḥurūfī thought in the course of the more than two centuries after Fażlullāh's great revelation. Apart from this being a consequence of the Ḥurūfīs' transformation from an openly missionizing to a secretly operating religion, the readiness to focus on such a typically "orthodox" issue as the number of ritual prayers might also have been a tactical move in order to bridge the gap between the more "heterodox" Ḥurūfīs and the Ottoman Sunni establishment and to unite them behind the project of fighting against "temptation and depravity." The implications of this new interpretation are quite significant, for it means that the Ḥurūfī religion was just as much an instrument of day-to-day politics as a matter of faith and principle. Perhaps the political aspect even dominated.

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[41] Cf. Kreiser/Neumann 2005: 204f., 239, 511. Editions: [Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg] 1939, [Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg] 2008.

[42] Cf. the quote from his *risāle* in Kreiser/Neumann 2005: 205.

[43] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 48r, l. 3.

[44] See Kreiser/Neumann 2005: 239.

6. Conclusion

The particular Ḥurūfī text that has been analyzed marks the change from a religious movement which initially pursued aggressive missionary activities to one which was more subdued vis-à-vis the ruling authorities. The prominent thematization of ritual prayer (*namāz*, *ṣalāt*) in the text can be interpreted as a compromise. On the one hand, this allowed the Ḥurūfī-bred author to propagate his interpretation of the alleged numerical values attached to the number of ritual prayers. On the other hand, the topic was also popular with non-Ḥurūfī, "orthodox" Sunni Muslims in the Empire, thus allowing the *muḳaddime*'s author to make his Ḥurūfī theses seem more in line with the official, politically sanctioned cult.

However, the text as a whole reveals that religion was not its only topic of interest. The propagation of sectarian religious views is joined to an articulation of political dissent, directed at the monarch himself. One explanation of these overlapping interests could be that both religious and political dissent demanded secrecy.

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Buddhist and Daoist influences on Neo-Confucian thinkers and their claim of orthodoxy[1]

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Abstract

This article aims to describe the Buddhist and Daoist influences on the formation of Neo-Confucianism in particular regarding its selection and exegesis of Confucian Classics and its view of the cosmos and the nature of man, as well as the quest for a certain mental state. The Buddhist and Daoist influences on Neo-Confucianism and the syncretistic tendencies during the Song and Ming dynasties made the question of heresy and orthodoxy acute. Thinkers who borrowed many alien elements are especially prone to strongly defend themselves with claims to orthodoxy, and at the same time are highly critical of the other traditions they often have forsaken at an earlier stage in their development. It is impossible to determine who was most influenced by Buddhism, Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming. The difference between them is not a difference in degree but that they adopted different parts of Buddhism, Zhu Xi more of its philosophy, whereas Wang Yangming more of its praxis.

Keywords: Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, syncretism, heterodoxy, orthodoxy, Song and Ming dynasties

To trace what are Buddhist and Daoist elements in Neo-Confucianism is very difficult since the three traditions are all very complex. The kind of Buddhism found in China during the Song dynasty (960–1279) was a tradition that had been deeply influenced by the Chinese mood of thinking, that is, Daoist beliefs as well as Confucian ideas. From the very beginning of Buddhism's arrival in China, shortly after the beginning of the Christian era, Buddhist ideas were explained by means of Daoist terms. Buddhism also influenced Daoism, and Daoism and Confucianism had also been influencing each other for a long time, if they ever had been totally separated. What we are trying to grasp therefore comprises several multilayered traditions.

The concept of Neo-Confucianism is related to several Chinese terms, like *lixue* 理学 "School of Principle" or *Song Ming lixue* 宋明理学 "School of Principle from the Song and Ming dynasty", *xinxue* 心学 "School of Heart and Mind", and *daoxue* 道学 "Learning of the Way", although none of these is a direct translation. *Lixue* usually refers to the School of Cheng Yi 程颐 (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), who are regarded as the main figures of the rationalistic wing of Neo-Confucianism. *Xinxue* refers to the School of Lu Xiangshan 陆象山 (1139–93) and Wang Yangming 王阳明 (1472–1529), the idealistic wing of Neo-Confucianism. *Daoxue* is a term that derives from the idea that there was an orthodox transmission of the *Way* through a line of early sage-rulers to Confucius and then to Mencius (ca 371–289 B.C.). Followers of this idea were called *daoxuejia* 道学家 . The English term Neo-Confucianism is wider than all these Chinese terms, bringing together several different thinkers and contradictory philosophical ideas. It is most likely that the Japanese adopted the term from European Orientalists. Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan, 1895–1990) seems to be the first scholar to use its Chinese equivalent *xin ru xue* 新儒学 , which in turn was translated back into English by Derk Bodde as Neo-Confucianism. It ought to be mentioned that the term Neo-Confucianism should be distinguished from New Confucianism *dangdai/xiandai xinruxue* 当代 / 现代新儒学 , which refers to the modern Confucian movement of the twentieth century.[2] However, the New Confucian movement is to a great extent inspired by Neo-Confucian thinkers. There is therefore a strong link between the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties and the New Confucianism of the twentieth century. Some scholars are critical of the term Neo-Confucianism, claiming that there was never a distinct break between the earlier Confucians and the thinkers usually labeled Neo-Confucian.[3] I agree with this to a certain degree, but find it practical to use Neo-Confucianism, especially in this article, to cover both the School of Principle and the School of Mind.

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[1] An earlier draft of this article was discussed at a seminar at the Dept. of History of Religions, Stockholm University. I would like to thank the participants at the seminar including my supervisors Per-Arne Berglie and Torbjörn Lodén for commenting on it. I would also like to express my thanks for support from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Foundation of Rune and Margot Johansson, Uppsala, the Foundation of Birgit and Gad Rausing, Lund, and the Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Fudan University, Shanghai. This support enabled me to make two study trips to China, one in 2009 and one in 2011. In March 2011, I held a lecture on Wang Gen at Fudan University which touched on the question of heresy and orthodoxy. I would like to thank Professors Ge Zhaoguang and Wu Zhen at Fudan University for their comments on my lecture and suggestions for my research. Professor Deng Zhifeng was especially helpful during my visit to Fudan University. Finally, I wish to mention Michael Knight who, under time pressure, improved my English, and Erik Östling who made the layout of the diagram of Zhou Dunyi.

There has been some discussion about who was most influenced by Buddhism: Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming. Wing-tsit Chan argues that Wang Yangming's affinities with Buddhism are exaggerated. My hypothesis is that it is not possible to compare the degree of influence; they were both influenced by Buddhism but were attracted to different parts of the Buddhist philosophy and praxis. Whereas Zhu Xi was more influenced by Huayan philosophy as it survived within Chan Buddhism, Wang Yangming incorporated more adoptions of Chan Buddhist praxis. When adopting Buddhist and Daoist elements, the question of orthodoxy becomes acute, and this is most likely one reason for the Neo-Confucian obsession with this question. The significance of orthodoxy and heterodoxy lies in the question of the essence of different traditions. Another hypothesis in this article is that representatives of orthodoxy often stay very close to the heterodoxy; in other words, because they are dangerously close to heterodoxy, they feel compelled to claim an orthodox stance. Most of the Neo-Confucians discussed in this article have been accused of heresy. At the same time they defend themselves and use the word heresy, *yiduan* 异端 , about a certain stance, tendency or attitude of their adversaries, while their own stance is characterized as orthodox, *zhengtong* 正统 .

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[2] John Makeham, 2010, *Dao Companion to Neo-Confucian Philosophy,* p. xi . See also Chen Lai, 2003, *Song Ming Lixue,* p. 1.

[3] See Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, "A New Direction in Confucian Scholarship: Approaches to Examining the Differences between Neo-Confucianism" and Tao-hsüe, in: *Philosophy East and West,* Vol. 43, No. 3 (Jul., 1992) pp. 455–474.

The main characteristics of Neo-Confucianism

In the following discussion, I will focus on four characteristics of Neo-Confucianism and examine each of them in order to grasp the Buddhist and Daoist influences on each aspect. [4] First, Neo-Confucianism is a movement of reinterpreting the Confucian classics. Certain classics, like the *Four Books*: the *Analects, Mencius,* the *Great Learning and* the *Doctrine of the Mean,* became more important than before the Neo-Confucian era, and the questions raised in relation to the old texts were different. Second, the Neo-Confucian view of the cosmos and the essential nature of things was described by concepts like *yin* 阴 and *yang* 阳 , the five phases *wuxing* 五行 , the Supreme Ultimate *taiji* 太及 , and Principle *li* 理 , and Material force *qi* 气 . A pioneer in this respect was Zhou Dunyi 周敦颐 (101773), but the systematization was mainly performed by Zhu Xi. Third, the view of man was described by a similar vocabulary and was closely related to the view of the cosmos. Fourth, the Confucian sage was an ideal, and to realize the mental state of the sage was regarded as the goal of life. To reach this ideal state of mind, methods for self-cultivation were ordained. The five Confucian ideals, benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, *li* 礼 , wisdom, and loyalty, were regarded as cardinal moral principles, and the Neo-Confucians argued that the moral principles were inner qualities. In this respect, they resembled earlier Confucianism, but they had a different view of moral praxis and human desires. It would be tempting to say that the Neo-Confucian thinkers had a more negative view of desires compared to the view found in the Confucian Classics, but this article only goes so far as to suggest that the Neo-Confucian view of desires diverges, at least if we recognize He Xinyin and Li Zhi as belonging to the Neo-Confucian tradition. The main part of this tradition rejects desires, in a way very similar to the ideals of the Buddhist monk. No matter what the view of desires, the methods of self-cultivation in most cases came from the *Four Books* or from early Confucian learning, mainly aimed at developing skills of the mind. It has been suggested that a common tendency within Neo-Confucianism, which is different from earlier Confucianism, was a kind of fundamentalism and “restorationism”.[5] The leaders of Neo-Confucianism during the Song dynasty used the slogans “Return to the Past” and “Restore the old order” *fugu* 复古 . One component of this attitude was to return to certain Confucian classics.

Reinterpretation of the classics

Interpreting the classics has always been a fundamental activity of Confucians. From the former Han-dynasty (206 B.C.–25 A.D.), when Confucianism became the official ideology under Emperor Wu (156–87 B.C.), the *Book of Poetry,* the *Book of Documents,* the *Book of Rites,* the *Book of Changes* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* were counted as the five classics, but already during the later Han dynasty (25–

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[4] In this I follow to a great extent Chen Lai, *Songming Lixue* 宋明理学 2008, p. 11.

[5] Wm Theodore De Bary, 1959, “Common Tendencies in Neo-Confucianism.” In: *Confucianism in Action,* p. 34.

220) the *Analects* and the *Book of Filial Piety* were added. Gradually, the number of classics increased.[6]

For the Neo-Confucian thinkers, certain texts became more interesting than others. Han Yu 韩愈 (768–824), who is regarded by many scholars as a forerunner of the Neo-Confucian era, turned his attention toward *Mencius*. Han Yu places Mencius in the orthodox line of succession from Confucius. It was the discussions on mind and human nature and Mencius' method of self-cultivation through nourishing the mind that appealed to Han Yu and his contemporaries. It is very likely that the reason for this interest in the *Book of Mencius* was the Neo-Confucians' familiarity with similar Buddhist discussions. One could say that the Buddhist interest in the mind and Buddhist and Daoist meditation techniques cleared the way for a new Confucian interest in early Confucian texts dealing with similar topics. Later, Zhu Xi would select *Mencius* as one of the *Four Books,* which became the core curriculum for the civil service examination for six hundred years until the system was abolished in 1905. During the Zhou dynasty (770–221 B.C.), the position of Xunzi (ca 298–238 B.C.), an antagonist of Mencius but also a Confucian, was as high as that of Mencius, and during the Qin dynasty (221 B.C.–206 B.C.) Mencius was forbidden by the legalist ruler Qin Shi Huangdi (259 B.C.210 B.C.), but during the Song and Ming dynasties the supremacy of Mencius was unquestioned by the Neo-Confucians.[7]

The *Great Learning* was another text that Han Yu held in high esteem, and which Zhu Xi regarded as the most fundamental and most suitable for a beginner student. Therefore, Zhu Xi placed it as the first of the *Four Books,* followed by the *Doctrine of the Mean,* the *Analects,* and *Mencius.* The *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* are originally chapters from the *Book of Rites.* As is explained above, the Neo-Confucian methods of self-cultivation was inspired by the *Four Books* and by early Confucian learning. The aim was to develop skills of the mind.[8]

The *Book of Changes* consists of two parts, the first being a manual of divination and the second, called the *Ten Wings* or *shiyi,* consisting of commentaries on the first part. The *Ten Wings* are traditionally attributed to Confucius. Modern scholars assume that the *Book of Changes* was put together as a coherent text in the ninth century B.C., and that the *Ten Wings* dates from different periods, some before Confucius' time and some after.[9] The Confucians regard the *Book of Changes* as a Confucian classic. At the same time, it is also a very important text for the Daoists. The older parts of the text were written before Confucianism and Daoism had crystalized into two different and opposite currents of thought. The following section will show the importance of this text for the development of Neo-Confucian cosmology.

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[6] Torbjörn Lodén, 2006, *Rediscovering Confucianism: A major philosophy in East Asia*, Global Oriental, Folkestone, pp. 7–13.

[7] Fung Yu-lan, 1983, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 2, Princeton: Princeton U.P., p. 411.

[8] Chen Lai, 2008, p. 11.

[9] *The Classic of Changes : a new translation of the I Ching as interpreted by Wang Bi* , 1994, transl. by Richard John Lynn, New York : Columbia University Press, cop., pp. 2–3.

A different view of the cosmos and the essential nature of things

The Neo-Confucian view of the cosmos has deep roots in Chinese thought. An important source of inspiration for Zhu Xi was Zhou Dunyi. Zhu Xi places him at the beginning of the *daoxue* tradition, something which has been criticized by those who argue that Zhou Dunyi was a pseudo-Daoist and that the *daoxue* tradition should begin with Cheng Yi 程颐 (1033–1108). Zhou Dunyi's famous *taiji tu* 太极图 or "Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate"[10] has been a hot topic of scholarly debate, and the views on its Daoist or Buddhist origin diverge. Some argue that it goes back to a Daoist priest, Chen Tuan 陈抟 (ca 906–989). The exact appearance of Chen Tuan's Diagram is not certain, but Zhou Dunyi mentions him in his writings. Some scholars argue that he should not belong to the *daoxue* tradition, which in that case would begin with Cheng Yi. For example, A.C. Graham claims that Zhou Dunyi was a Confucian-Daoist syncretist. Graham blames Zhu Xi for making Zhou Dunyi the founder of Neo-Confucianism and argues that Zhou's contribution to Neo-Confucianism was only the Supreme Ultimate.[11] Wing Tsit-chan is not one of those who want to place Zhou Dunyi outside the Neo-Confucian tradition, but he recognizes that Zhou assimilated the Daoist element of *wuji* 无极 to Confucian thought and argues that he was inspired by the Daoist classic *Daodejing* in using this concept. The fact that Zhou uses the diagram for rational philosophy and not, like the religious Daoists, to obtain elixir for immortality, is what makes him a Confucian and not a Daoist, according to Chan.

Wuji has been translated in several different ways; Wing-tsit Chan translates it as "non-being", but Feng Youlan/Fung Yu-lan (or Derk Bodde) uses the word "ultimateless"[12] and Julia Ching translates it as "limitless."[13] The discrepancies in understanding Zhou Dunyi are not only related to separate concepts but also to the totality of his philosophy. Zhou Dunyi's explanation of his own diagram was inspired by the *Book of Changes.* He begins his commentary on the diagram by speaking of *wuji* and *taiji,* which through movements produce *yang*. When *yang* has reached its climax, it is followed by quiescence, which produces *yin*, as in the *Book of Changes*, but in the latter text this is followed by the Four Emblems *sixiang* 四像 and the Eight Trigrams *bagua* 八卦 . In contrast, Zhou Dunyi says that *yin* and *yang* produce the Five Phases, *wuxing* 五行 , which are metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. The circle under the Five Phases (see the figure) represents how *yin* moves the female and *yang* the male. The last circle likens the union of the two sexes to the production of the myriads of beings. When studying the diagram from top to bottom, the reader gets an illustration of how *yin* and *yang* give rise to the phenomenal world, but Zhou

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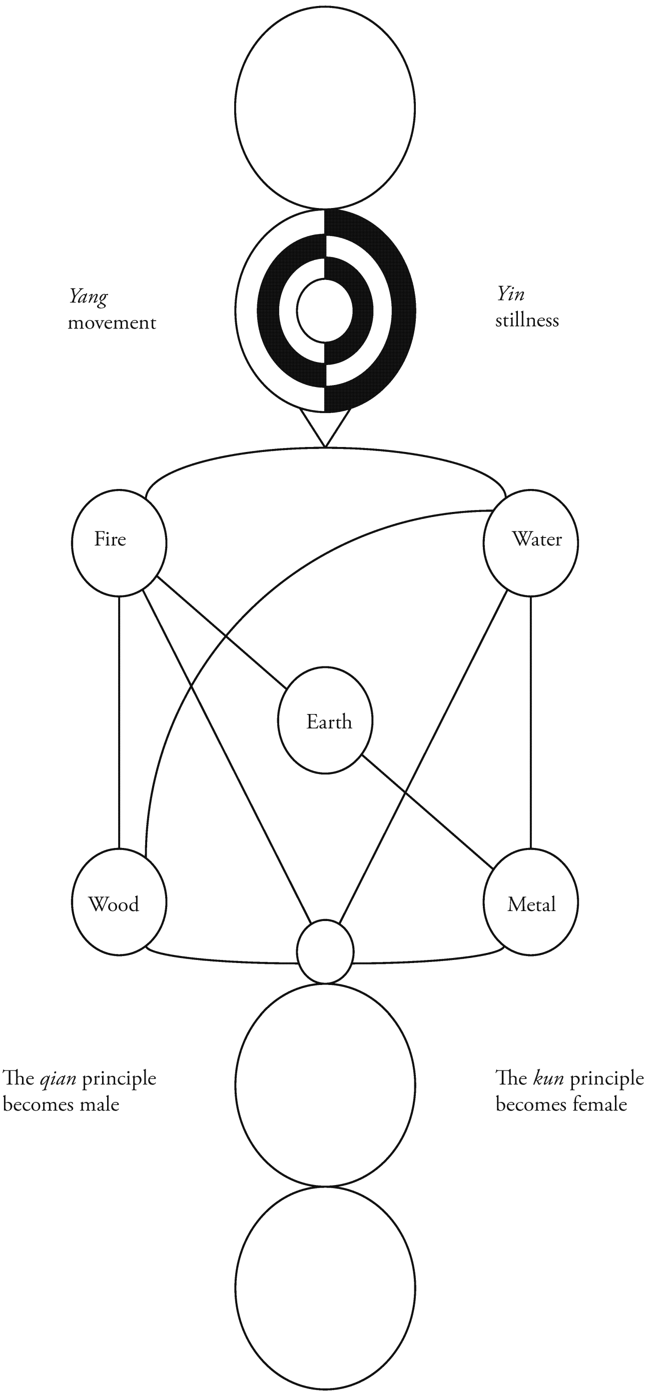
[10] Tze-ki Hon follows Joseph Adler in translating *taiji tu* as "the Supreme Polarity." See his article "Zhou Dunyi's Philosophy of the Supreme Polarity", in *Dao Companion to Neo-Confucian Philosophy,* 2010, Makeham ed., Springer Science+Business Media, B.V. p. 2. They argue that *taiji* means the unity of the *yin-yang* polarity, but for me the term Supreme Polarity emphasizes the polarity and not the unity, so I still prefer "the Supreme Ultimate."

[11] A.C. Graham, 1958, *Two Chinese Philosophers, Ch'eng Ming-tao and Ch'eng Yi-ch'uan,* p. xix.

[12] Fung, 1983, .p. 435.

[13] Julia Ching, 2000, *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi,* Oxford U.P., New York, p. 15.

Taiji and *wuji*


Yang
movement
Yin
stillness
Fire
Water
Earth
Wood
Metal
The *qian* principle becomes male
The *kun* principle becomes female

Production and transformation of all things

Dunyi also asks us to read it from the bottom up, which illustrates how human beings take part in the unfolding of the universe.[14]

In addition to the indications of Daoist influences on Zhou Dunyi's thought there are also those who point to Buddhist influences. The Japanese scholar Azuma Juji 吾妻重二 suggests that the diagram of *Ālaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness) made by the Buddhist monk Zongmi (780–841) may have influenced him. Zongmi's diagram is based on Yogacara Buddhism and its view of the mind/consciousness (ālaya). In Azuma's analysis, there is a parallel between the Supreme Ultimate *taiji* and *ālaya.*[15]

Zhou Dunyi says that the principle of the Supreme Ultimate, *li*, also pervades man, and since the Supreme Ultimate is good; man's nature is also good. The goodness in man makes him sincere, *cheng* 诚 , and this sincerity is the foundation of the sage. Zhou further says that sincerity lies in non-activity and that the origin of evil is activity. Hence, Zhou was later accused of overemphasizing tranquility. The Cheng brothers, Cheng Hao 程颢 (1032–85) and Cheng Yi, were students of Zhou Dunyi for a while, so his ideas were transmitted to them. The Cheng brothers did not take the civil service examination or hunt animals. In this decision, they were probably influenced by Zhou Dunyi, indicating that Zhou had Buddhist inclinations. Since Zhou Dunyi connects his metaphysics with ideas on moral behavior, the New Confucian thinker Mou Zongsan calls the philosophy of Zhou Dunyi "moral metaphysics."[16] This does not contradict the fact that through Zhou Dunyi certain Daoist elements take part in the Neo-Confucian formation of cosmology and the Neo-Confucian path to becoming a sage.

In contrast to Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai 张载 (1020–77) discards both *yin* and *yang* and the Five Phases. Instead, he identifies the material force *qi* 气 in the Supreme Ultimate itself. The Chinese concept of *qi* is very old and is variously translated as "breath", "energy", "ether", or as above, "material force." It is compared to the Greek word *pneuma* and to the Sanskrit word *prāṇa.* Usually it is associated with Daoist yoga techniques, as in the text *Guanzi* from the fourth century B.C.[17] For Zhang Zai, *yin* and *yang* are only two aspects of *qi* which lie behind a process of perpetual integration and disintegration. This idea made him strongly oppose the Buddhist belief in annihilation and Daoist non-being. He could only see a transformation of things. A famous statement of this is: "The universe is one, but its manifestations are many."

The Cheng brothers made the concept of the Principle, *li* 理, the basis of their philosophy. This concept is also found in Daoism, as well as in Buddhism, but it was never their central concept as it is in the philosophy of the Cheng brothers.[18] Chinese Buddhists associated the term *li* with consciousness *prajñā.* According to the Cheng brothers, everything and everyone has Principle and is governed by it. If Zhang Zai said: "The universe is one, but its manifestations are many," Cheng Yi, with his emphasis on Principle, made a paraphrase: "The Principle is one, but its manifestations are many." This idea has its root in Buddhist philosophy, especially Huayan philosophy, which stresses the harmony of principle and facts *shi* 实.[19] In Huayan philosophy, *li* is a general truth or principle that governs phenomenal things, *shi.* Everything enters or penetrates everything else, but without losing its own identity. One metaphor for this is Indra's net, which pictures a universe in which every entity that exists is like a jewel placed at one of the knots of a vast net. Each jewel reflects all the other jewels, that is, each particular reflects the totality. The totality is both a unity and a multiplicity.[20] This idea influenced Zhou Dunyi, who stresses the interdependence of the universe and the myriad things *wanwu* 万物 .[21]

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[14] Feng Youlan only mentions the top to bottom reading. See Fung p. 442.

[15] Ching, 2000, p. 18.

[16] Hon, 2010, p. 8.

[17] Ching, 2000, p. 28.

[18] Wing-tsit Chan, 1973, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton U.P. p. 519.

Zhu Xi (1130—1200) is the great synthesizer of Neo-Confucian thought. He took the ideas of Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, and the Cheng brothers and combined them into one system. For him, the Supreme Ultimate *taiji* involves both *li* and *qi*. *Li* is incorporeal and unchanging. It is above form, whereas *qi* is within form. All things have both *li* and *qi. Qi* is the physical form of everything and is subject to transformation. *Li* is eternal and all-pervading. Although there is only one *li*, each thing has its own particular *li. Li* and *qi* are seemingly dualistic but in reality are never separated. Zhu maintains that it is impossible to say that *li* precedes *qi.*[22]

The nature of man

Early in Confucian tradition, Mencius and Xunzi maintained the opposing views of human nature. According to Mencius, we are all basically good. The proof, in his view, is that everyone who sees a child falling into a well will immediately react and feel an impulse to save the child. Xunzi said that man has a tendency to be selfish and that we therefore need rewards and punishments to stimulate us to do what is good and avoid evil behavior.

The Tang thinkers Han Yu and Li Ao 李敖 (?–844) had discussed human nature and its relation to feelings. According to Li Ao, the seven feelings – joy, anger, pity, fear, love, hate, and desire – cause obscurement and destroy man's original nature. When the movements of the feelings cease, the mind becomes clear and man can return to his original nature. These ideas come very close to Buddhist philosophy, but whereas the Confucians talk about nature, *xing* 性 , the Buddhists use the expression "original mind" *benxin* 本心 . [23]

As we have seen above, Zhou Dunyi argues that human nature is good and that evil comes with activity. Cheng Hao maintains a similar view. According to him, human nature in its original tranquil state is neither good nor evil. Good and evil arise when human nature is aroused and manifests in feelings and actions. Therefore, the main task of moral and spiritual cultivation is to calm one's nature and be impartial. Cheng Hao compares human nature to water. Dirty and turbid water is also water, so evil is also a part of human nature, but man has to make an effort to purify his nature and calm the mind. He says that "the original goodness of human nature is like the original clearness of water."[24]

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[19] Chan, 1973, p. 544.

[20] Robert M. Gimello on Hua-yen, in: *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1987, vol. 6, p. 485–489.

[21] Ching, 2000, p. 23.

[22] Ching, 2000, p. 29.

[23] Fung, 1983, p. 414.

Zhu Xi is also a follower of Mencius' optimistic view of human nature. Zhu Xi believes that everyone can become a sage, but he is also aware of the existence of evil. Like everything else in the world, human beings are endowed with *li* and *qi*. Zhu Xi says that man's nature is the principle, *li*, of the mind. Emotions are the movements of the mind and they are manifestations of *qi*. Zhu Xi does not condemn human desires as such, only the wild and violent passions. It is when the emotions go to excess that they become evil.

The Neo-Confucian notion of feelings often comes very close to the Buddhist term "passions" *fannao* 烦恼 or *klésa*.[25] The Neo-Confucian tradition has therefore been accused of a negative attitude towards feelings, love, and passion. As in many other cases, judgments differ. Chen Lai argues against Neo-Confucianism being a sort of asceticism. He says that the Neo-Confucian slogan "adhere to the Heavenly principles and reject desires" does not mean that one should eliminate all sexual feelings and emotional longings, only those that oppose moral principles. Chen Lai further argues that sexual intercourse between husband and wife was regarded not only as normal behavior by the Neo-Confucians but also as having a metaphysical dimension corresponding to the power of Heaven and Earth.[26] Nevertheless, Zhu Xi seems to be zealous in "uprooting" and "killing" bad feelings and weeds of evil behavior.[27] His attitude is in sharp contrast to the attitude of later Neo-Confucians of the Ming dynasty adopted by He Xinyin何心隐 (1517–1579) and Li Zhi李贽(1527–1602). Inspired by the founder of the Taizhou movement, Wang Gen 王艮 (1483–1541), and his affirmation of the self, He Xinyin wanted to liberate man from traditional forms of self-repression. He maintained that it was impossible for man to be without desires, since the wish to be without desire is also a sort of desire. For He Xinyin, self-expression was more important than self-restraint, which is why he read a famous passage in the *Analects* in a completely different way. According to traditional reading, it says about Confucius: "There were four things from which the Master [i.e. Confucius] was entirely free. He had no foregone conclusions, no arbitrary predeterminations, no obstinacy, and no egoism." He Xinyin interpreted this as if "Confucius would have nothing to do with non-egoism, non-insistence, non-obstinacy, and having no-ideas-of-one's-own."[28] Li Zhi, who is characterized as an arch-individualist by de Bary, wrote an essay called *Childlike Mind* (*Tongxin* 童心) in which he praises the original and pure mind of the child. According to him, the greatest threat to this pure mind is moral doctrines and principles. One difference between He Xinyin and Li Zhi is that He Xinyin was not attracted by Buddhism or the movement "the three teachings merge into one," *san jiao he yi* 三教合一 which suggested that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism had the same basis. In contrast to him, Li Zhi was inspired by the *Diamond Sutra* and was also receptive the three teachings movement. He even forsook his family and took the tonsure, although this tonsure was not performed by a Buddhist monk and therefore not officially sanctioned. Needless to say, these two thinkers were strongly criticized by contemporary and later Neo-Confucians. They were both arrested and subsequently killed, He Xinyin by his jailers and Li Zhi by his own hand.[29] Whether Zhu xi's attitudes regarding feelings and selfishness on the one hand, and those of He Xinyin and Li Zhi on the other all belong to Neo-Confucianism is a question of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, but it is a historical fact that the position of Zhu Xi belongs to mainstream Neo-Confucianism, whereas He Xinyin and Li Zhi place themselves in the margin.

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[24] Chan, 1973, p. 528.

[25] Fung, 1983, p. 414.

[26] Chen Lai, 2008, pp. 2–3.

[27] Ching, 2000, p. 125.

[28] Theodore de Bary, 1970, Individualism and Humanitarianism, in: *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, de Bary ed., Colombia U.P., p. 181.

The ideal of the Confucian sage and his mental state

As has been pointed out previously, the Neo-Confucians had a positive view of man's ability to improve himself through exercises and learning, even though they recognized that it was very difficult to become a sage. Zhu Xi maintains that the mind should control the emotions and desires. To control the emotions, Zhu Xi ordains quiet sitting, *jingzuo* 静坐 . Zhu Xi practiced both Buddhist and Daoist meditation for many years, but he later lost his belief in the possibility of totally emptying the mind. Instead of speaking of stillness or quietude, he therefore chooses the word reverence, *jing* 敬. This is similar to Cheng Yi.[30] There are scholars, like Liu Ts'un-yan, who have come to the conclusion that Zhu Xi was more influenced in his mental cultivation by Daoism than by Buddhism. Zhu Xi's practice of Daoist meditation in his youth resulted in the text *Instructions for Breath Control* 调息箴 . He also wrote commentaries on Daoist Classics.[31] Although he changed his mind about Buddhism and Daoism, he never abandoned the idea of meditation and its beneficial effects on human nature.

The goal strived for is a state of mind before emotions occur. According to Zhu Xi, this is the state the *Doctrine of the Mean* refers when it talks of the mean, *zhong* 中 . It is a sort of emotional equilibrium. The meditation of Zhu Xi includes self-examination, which entails correct behavior. In Neo-Confucianism, the view of man and the view of meditation are seldom separate from ethics. Inspired by the *Great Learning,* Zhu Xi also advocates the investigation of things. By the investigation of things Zhu Xi means the study of the inherent principle in everything.[32] It is clear that his examination has two directions, one inward and one outward. This must have been his way of harmonizing activity and tranquility. Zhu Xi's emphasis on the investigation of things was criticized by Lu Xiangshan. They were contemporaries and met a few times to discuss essential questions, but their differences regarding learning and the way to sagehood were obvious, and this was the reason why the School of Principle, *Lixue*, and School of Mind and Heart, *Xinxue*, became the two opposite schools within Neo-Confucianism. Lu Xiangshan said that one can find principles by concentrating on the mind and that “the Six Classics were all footnotes to his [Lu Xiangshan’s] mind.”[33] Hence, Zhu Xi criticized him for Chanism, saying “when he speaks of meaning of things, he acts like a salt smuggler in central Fukien, who hides the salt underneath fish to avoid detection. For his teaching is basically Ch’an, but he covers it up by using our Confucian language.”[34] Lu Xiangshan, in return, criticized Zhu Xi for Daoist tendencies, when Zhu Xi equated *taiji* with *wuji*.[35] However, it was not until the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) that the rational learning of Zhu Xi was thoroughly challenged. This challenge came from Wang Yangming, who was initially greatly influenced by Zhu Xi and his idea of “the investigation of things.” As a young man, Wang Yangming and a friend of his decided to follow Zhu Xi and investigate the principle in things. They started with an investigation of bamboo. After some days of intensive attention to the bamboo, his friend fell ill, and a few days later the same happened to Wang Yangming. The result was that Wang Yangming lost his belief in the doctrine of Zhu Xi and opposed it on almost every point. Wang Yangming came to the same conclusion as Lu Xiangshan, namely that the only thing a man needed to do was to investigate the mind. Hence, Wang Yangming became the most influential proponent of the School of Mind and Heart during the Ming dynasty.

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[29] Ibid., See de Bary's chapter "Innocence and intelligence" pp. 193–197.

[30] Ching, 2000, p. 115.

[31] Liu Ts'un-yan, *Taoist Self-Cultivation,* in: *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, 1970, De Bary ed., p. 312.

[32] Ching, 2000, p. 101.

Usually, the idealistic Wang Yangming, like Lu Xiangshan, is regarded as more influenced by Buddhism, and especially Chan Buddhism, than the rationalistic representative Zhu Xi. Like Lu Xiangshan, he believes that principle is inherent in mind, contrary to Zhu Xi who advocates an objective study of principles in things. Despite this, Wing-tsit Chan argues that both the critics and the supporters of Wang Yangming have exaggerated his affinity with Buddhism and have underestimated his attacks on it.[36] Chan especially criticizes the Japanese expert on the relationship between Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism, Tokiwa Daijo 常盤大定 (1870–1945), for this tendency. Wing-tsit Chan points out that both Zhou Dunyi and Zhang Zai had close relations with Buddhists, but that Wang Yangming did not have any Buddhist friends and that his visits to Buddhist temples did not imply any deep connection to Buddhism. Wing-tsit Chan further observes that Wang Yangming did not converse with Buddhists in the temples as, for example, Cheng Hao did.[37] Wing-tsit Chan admits that Wang Yangming uses Buddhistic language but argues that he uses this language to express ideas that are non-Buddhist. However, when Wang Yangming equates the Confucian “innate knowledge of the good,” *liangzhi* 良知 , with what the Buddhists call “original state,” he is speaking of the ideas, and is not only using Buddhistic language. The idea of innate knowledge comes from Mencius. Wang Yangming added that this knowledge has to be extended into action. This is what he calls “the extension of innate knowledge,” *zhi liangzhi* 致良知 . Wing-tsit

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[33] Ibid., p. 151.
[34] Ibid., p. 150.
[35] Ibid., p. 140.
[36] Wing-tsit Chan, 1962, *How Buddhistic is Wang Yangming,* in: *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 12, no 3, pp 203–215, p. 203.
[37] Ibid., p. 209.

Chan admits that the idea that the principle is inherent in mind is more Buddhist than Confucian, but claimes that Wang Yangming received it not directly from Buddhism but rather via the earlier Neo-Confucian thinker Lu Xiangshan. However, this does not contradict the fact that Buddhist ideas influenced the thought of Wang Yangming.

Wang Yangming is a man of action whereas Zhu Xi is an intellectual. It is therefore natural that Zhu Xi was attracted by the philosophy of the Huayan School, while Wang Yangming's inclinations were more towards the anti-intellectualism of Chan Buddhism. Regarding Daoism, they adopted certain ideas and attitudes in their youth. Wang Yangming spent almost thirty years studying Daoist literature. It is unlikely that this did not leave an imprint on him. In answer to a question by a disciple, he once said: "Innate knowledge *liangzhi* is one. Its active function is called spirit, its pervasion the *qi*, and its condensation the sperm. How could these things be taught in concrete form? The sperm of the true yin is the mother of the *qi* of the true yang; the *qi* of the true yang is the father of the true sperm of the true yin. The yin is rooted in the yang, and vice versa; they are not two different things."[38] In this quotation, we can clearly see his Daoist influences. Hagiographical material claims that he attained a stage of Daoist enlightenment in 1502. This was regarded as a preliminary stage before the practioner can form "a sacred embryo" in his "cinnabar field."[39] However, Wang Yangming later denied that it was possible to ascend to Heaven and become an immortal as religious Daoists believed.[40] In addition, Zhu Xi rejected Daoism in his latter days.

Syncretism and definitions of orthodoxy

Different thinkers and religious leaders during the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties went in and out of the existing traditions. This was not without inner struggles, but it was at least possible for them to change stance several times during a lifetime. Zhu Xi admitted that he delved into Buddhism and Daoism for over ten years during his youth. After he met his teacher Li Tong, he decided to concentrate on the learning of the Confucian sages.[41] Wang Yangming explores a similar path of development. "He went in and out of Buddhism and Daoism for a long time. After having experienced difficulties during his exile among the barbarians, his mind was moved and his nature strengthened. Because of this, he pondered over what the sages would have said in a situation like this. Suddenly, he was enlightened about the meaning of the investigation of things and extension of one's knowledge, [he understood] the Way of the sages, and that nature is sufficient in itself without searching for anything false from outside."[42] Other thinkers made a different journey, like the Buddhist leader from the late Ming dynasty, Ouyi Zhixu 蕅益智旭 (1599–1655). He was born in a Buddhist family, but began writing commentaries on the Confucian classic the *Analects* and became convinced ot its truth while reading it. However, later he came to the conclusion that Confucianism was distorted by the Neo-Confucians and that the Confucian classics could only be understood completely through Buddhist interpretation.[43] Another example is Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株 (1535–1615), who began his career as a Confucian literatus passing the lowest level of the civil service examination at the age of seventeen. Eventually he became one of the most influential Buddhist leaders during late Ming dynasty.[44] "Conversion" is perhaps not a proper word in this Chinese context. It might be described as a change of perspective rather than the complete paradigm shift implied in the concept of conversion. It is also important to keep in mind that the Confucian and Daoist classics were a common cultural heritage for educated people during the Ming period, whether Buddhists, Daoists, or Confucians. In the same way as the Buddhists commented on the Confucian Classics, the Neo-Confucians made commentaries on Daoist and Buddhist scriptures. During the late Ming dynasty, Matteo Ricci and other Jesuit missionaries entered China, which created a new religious and ideological confrontation. I will not go into this question in this article, but it would be fruitful to investigate attitudes towards Buddhism compared with Christianity which had not yet become a part of the Chinese cultural heritage as the Buddhist religion was at the time of the formation of Neo-Confucianism.

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[38] Liu, 1970, p. 308.
[39] Ibid., p. 314.
[40] Ibid., p. 310.
[41] Ching, 2000, p. 152.
[42] Huang Zongxi, 2008, *Mingru Xue'an* 明儒学案 , Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, p. 180.

At the same time as Song and Ming thinkers changed their convictions, they also criticized each other. This criticism becomes very apparent after a "conversion". It is a paradox that thinkers who have borrowed many elements from other traditions are harsher in their criticism than those not having made such a journey. One striking example is Han Yu, who implemented or reimplemented a Buddho-Daoist interest in the mind into Confucianism and became an important persecutor of Neo-Confucianism. At the same time, he is the most well-known critic of Buddhism, having written an essay criticizing the imperial welcoming of the Bone of Buddha in 819. His inner tension between an attraction to Buddhist theories of the mind and hostility towards Buddhist religious praxis is obvious. This inner tension would later be a recurring theme in Neo-Confucian attitudes. Han Yu's criticism was based on the simple idea that Buddhism was foreign and barbarian. Later, the criticism formulated by Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming would be much more sophisticated. The Buddhist leader Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655) criticized Christianity basically because, in his view, it transferred ethical responsibility from man to God and Jesus Christ. However, his criticism of Christian dogmas in the *Collected Essays Refuting Heterdoxy* (*Pixie ji* 辟邪集) might mainly have served as a means to conceal his earlier attacks on Buddhism, something he regretted after his "conversion" to Buddhism.[45] Zhu Xi criticized Buddhism for several reasons, among other things for dividing the mind into two, one examining the other. In his *Treatise on the Examina-*

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[43] Ibid., p. 940.

[44] See Chün-fang Yü, 1981, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China; Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis*, N.Y.: Columbia U.P.

[45] Beverly Foulks, 2008, *Duplicitous Thieves: Ouyi Zhixu's Criticism of Jesuit Missionaries in Late Imperial China*, Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal (2008, 21:55–75) Taipei: Chung-Hwa Insitute of Buddhist Studies, ISSN: 1017-7132.

tion of the Mind (*Guan xin shuo* 观心说), Zhu Xi says: “The mind is that with which man rules his body. It is one and not a duality, it is subject and not object, and controls the external world instead of being controlled by it. Therefore, if we examine external objects with the mind, their principles will be apprehended. Now (in the Buddhist view), there is another thing to examine the mind. If this is true, then outside this mind there is another one which is capable of controlling it.”[46] He was also critical of the Buddhist as well as Daoist overemphasis on tranquility, saying: “Mencius also wanted to preserve the restorative influence of the night. But in order to do so, one has to pay attention to what he does during the day.”[47] Wang Yangming argued that the Chan Buddhist ideal of Huineng and Shenhui to be without thoughts is impossible. He says in *Instructions for Practical Living* 传习录 : “To be vigilant and prudent is also thought. Vigilant and prudent thought never ceases. If vigilant and prudent thought disappears slightly, it is because one becomes dizzy or because it is transformed into an evil thought. From morning until evening, from youth to old age, if one wants to be without thoughts, that is, to cease to know, it is not possible unless one is asleep or like a withered tree or dead ashes.”[48] He further argued that the Buddhists did not live up to their own ideal of non-attachment and accused them of escaping from the burdens of social relations.[49] During the late Ming dynasty, a different view on orthodoxy and heterodoxy emerges in the teaching of Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583). He was a disciple of Wang Yangming, and shifted the main focus within Neo-Confucian circles from criticizing Buddhism and Daoism to an internal critique of the “secularism” or “vulgarity,” *suxue* 俗学 , of Neo-Confucianism itself.[50]

The discussion about orthodoxy and heresy is related to the syncretistic tendencies, which are fairly strong even during the Song dynasty but became more accentuated during the Ming dynasty. Zhu Xi advocated the ideal to “meditate half the day and study the other half,” a famous quotation from *Classified Conversations of Zhu Xi* (Zhu Zi Yulei 朱子语类 , fascicle no 12). But what is the difference in essence between the different meditation techniques *jingzuo* 静坐 of the Confucians, *yangqi* 养气as the Daoists called it, and the *chan* 禅praxis of the Buddhists? Is it just a question of social affiliation and language style?

During the Ming dynasty, the Neo-Confucians as well as the Buddhists became more aware of the similarities between the different traditions, and therefore the ideas of “the three traditions merge into one” *san jiao heyi*, or “the three traditions are identical” *san jiao yizhi* 三教一致 . This became an ideal for some of them, like Lin Zhao’en 林兆恩 (1517–1598). He took the structure of inner alchemy and grounded it in the cosmological symbol system shared by the Confucians and the

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[46] Chan, 1973, p. 603.

[47] Ibid., p. 650.

[48] Wang Yangming, *Chuanxilu* 传习录 , in: *The Complete Works of Wang Yangming* 王阳明全集 ,1992, Shanghai 上海 : Shanghai Ancient Book Publishing House 上海古籍出版, Wu Guang 吴光, Qianming 钱明 , Dong Ping 董平 , Yao Yanfu 姚延福编 eds.?p. 35.

[49] Ibid, p. 99.

[50] Peng Guoxiang, 2005, *The Unfolding of the Learning of Innate Knowledge: Wang Ji and Wang Yangming’s Teaching in the Middle and Late Ming,* 良知学的展开 王龙溪与中晚明的阳明学 , Beijing 北京 : Life, Reading and New Knowledge Three United Bookstore 生活 , 读书 , 新知三联书店 p. 483.

Daoists.[51] He furthermore developed a system of mind-cultivation in nine stages, in which he integrated the three teachings into a single way, thereby becoming the "Master of The Three Teachings." Wang Ji also accepted the idea of three teaching as one and inspired the iconoclast Li Zhi in this direction. Consequently, syncretism is discussed among a wide range of scholars investigating Song and Ming religion. Recently, a tendency to use the concept of hybridization instead of syncretism in scholarly works can be seen. Frits Graf makes a distinction between normative and descriptive definitions of different religious systems.[52] He then suggests that the term "hybridization" be used for descriptive definitions, and the term "syncretism" be left for the believers in different religions. This seems to be a kind of social marker used by the scholar of religious studies rather than an attempt to clarify the dynamism itself. It is probably more clarifying, to argue like Judith Berling, that religious traditions often have several layers of orthodoxies, depending on who is making the definition. She claims that in the case of Chinese religion, there are definitions formulated by the state/emperor, definitions formulated by the religious elite like leaders of monasteries and other religious institutions, and definitions formulated by the intellectual elite are all linked to different forms of religious identity.[53]

To focus on the highest social level, the first emperor of the Ming dynasty, Ming Taizu (1328–1398), or Emperor Hongwu, is an interesting case. Due to his poor and orphaned childhood, he spent his youth in a Buddhist monastery, where he received his literacy. Later, he joined an anti-Mongol religious sect, the Red Turbans, which was related to the White Lotus Society and was influenced by a mixture of Buddhist and other religious ideas. His upbringing made him interested in Buddhist matters, but not partial toward Buddhism. In his *Essay on the Three Teachings*, he regarded the three traditions as complementary.[54] For him "Confucianism was the Way of manifest virtue, while Daoism and Buddhism were the Way of hidden virtue, secret aids of the Kingly Way. Together, the Three Teachings constituted the Way of Heaven."[55] In this way, the syncretistic tendencies of the Ming dynasty received imperial sanction.

A parallel to the syncretistic tendency is the process of bureaucratization through which all religions went during this period. In 1395, it was decided that all monks had to take an examination on Buddhist scriptures. The examinations resembled the civil service examinations insofar as the monks had to write essays in the "eight-legged" style. Emperor Hongwu's favorite sutras, the *Descent to Lanka Sutra* (*Laṅkāvatāra*), the *Diamond Sutra (Vajracchedikā)*, and the *Heart Sutra (Hṛdaya)* were studied and commented, and he personally wrote a preface to the *Heart Sutra.*[56] During the late Ming period, abbots of great monasteries were selected on the basis of the examinations.[57] In 1383, the Emperor Hongwu further created the Central Buddhist Registry, which was divided between the "right" patriarchs in charge of supervising the examination of monks and officials, and the "left" patriarchs in charge of supervising meditation and the study of gong'an cases. Monks who violated the Buddhist precepts were punished.[58] During the Ming dynasty, secularized or married Buddhist monks became widespread. This custom seems to go back to the Yuan dynasty, when Tibetan Buddhism was introduced into China, and is possibly linked with the tantric practice of sexual yoga.[59] The Ming rulers tried to control it with various regulations and penalties for married monks. Regarding the Daoist religion, the Emperor Hongwu established an Academy for Daoist Affairs, *xuan jiaoyuan* 玄教院 , to oversee Daoist organizations and temples, a parallel to the offices established to control the Buddhist *sangha*. The Central Daoist Registry, *dao lu si* 道录司 , controlled the numbers and conditions of ordination in order to limit the size and potential influence of Daoist religious institutions.[60]

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[51] Berling, 1998, p. 984.

[52] Fritz Graf, 2005, *Syncretism*, Encyclopedia of Religion 2nd edition.

[53] Judith A. Berling, 1980, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en, New York: Columbia U.P.*, p. 10.

[54] Romeyn Taylor, 1983, *An Imperial endorsement of syncretism: Ming T'ai-tsu's essay on the Three Teachings: translation and Commentary*, Journal of Ming studies, 16: 31–38 (Spring 1983) Emperor Hongwu did not necessarily compose the text himself, but since he sealed it he was aware of it and responsible for its ideas.

[55] Judith A. Berling, 1998, p. 978.

[56] Chün-fang Yü, 1998, p. 903.

The above-described governmental control of religions indicates that the obsession with defending oneself as a true exegete of a certain tradition was not only an intellectual game but was also based on real threats; and the fear was not only on the part of the individual proponents of conviction, it was also on the part of the ruler. As mentioned above, the Emperor Hongwu had personal experience of religious rebellion, which must be one reason why he wanted to control the religious organizations in detail. It is possible that his impartiality towards the three traditions was a powerful strategy rather than a manifestation of tolerance, or in other words, his way of establishing an equilibrium of balance of terror. Peter K. Bol has pointed out that the Emperor Hongwu was suspicious of his own bureaucracy and executed 45,000 officials, their kin, and their associates.[61] However, the danger of expressing heretical views is not evident in all instances. Theodore de Bary has noted that the Wang Yangming School continued to flourish during the Ming dynasty despite official suppression. He further notes that the grounds for persecution were usually political and not ideological.[62] It seemed especially dangerous to get involved in court politics. When the Buddhist leader Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1544–1604) was arrested and beaten to death with thirty strokes of a bamboo cane, it was not due to his Buddhist conviction but his connection with the Dowager Empress, and his having criticized the Emperor for unfilial behavior.[63] The reason Wang Yangming was struck forty times in front of the Emperor and sent into exile was a memorandum he wrote against the imprisonment of some scholars who had protested against the usurpation of power by the eunuch Liu Jin.[64]

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[57] Ibid., pp. 930–931.

[58] Ibid., P. 905.

[59] Ibid., p. 911.

[60] Ibid., p. 959.

[61] Peter K. Bol, 2008, *Neo-Confucianism in History,* Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Asia Center, p. 95.

[62] Wm Theodore de Bary, 1959, "Common Tendencies in Neo-Confucianism", in: *Confucianism in Action*, eds. David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright, Stanford: Stanford U.P., p. 29.

[63] Chün-fang Yü, 1998, p. 936.

[64] See the introduction by Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, in: *Instructions for practical living and other Neo-Confucian writings by Wang Yangming*, New York: Columbia U.P., p. xxiv.

De Bary tentatively suggests that "perhaps we fill in the picture with our own picture of totalitarian control in the forms developed today and, superimposing on the past, assume that the same intense and pervasive pressures operated to stultify thought."[65] The only case of pure ideological persecution is Li Zhi, who goes to the extreme in expressing heretical views.[66] His books *A book to burn* (*Fenshu*焚书) and *A book to be hidden away* (*Zangshu* 藏书 *)* are provocations that resulted in his imprisonment and the burning of his books.[67] Not only were his views heretical, his actions also reveal a wish to follow inner conviction rather than any written or unwritten rule.

If Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and other traditions are regarded as rivers, they may at a certain time in history have divided and formed three distinct streams, but during their wanderings they sometimes merge, either partially or entirely. The fierce persecution of the Buddhist Sangha during the Tang dynasty, which reached its peak in 845, blocked one river, but obviously the water took another route and oozed into the other two water systems, above all into the Confucian stream, which developed into something new. Structural parallels between that which Paul Demiéville calls the "subitist" and the gradualist way can be found in the opposition between Daoism and Confucianism, between the sudden and gradual path within Chan Buddhism, and also in the contradiction between the so-called left and right wings of the Wang Yangming School.[68] Does it amount to a substantial difference in conviction and praxis, or do the contradictions merely move from tradition to tradition and from one epoch to another? Peter N. Gregory has shown how the Tang-dynasty Buddhist leader Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰 宗密 (780–841) anticipated Zhu Xi's criticism of Buddhism in his critique of the Hongzhou line of Chan, and that they were both anxious to create an ontological basis for their ethics.[69] Zhu Xi developed his theory on human nature to provide such a basis.

The Qing scholar Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲 (1610–95) showed a similar concern in his criticism of Wang Ji and Wang Gen. In his monumental work, *The Records of the Ming Scholars, Mingru Xue'an* 明儒学案 , Huang Zongxi declares:

> Thanks to Wang Gen and Wang Ji, the teaching of Master Wang Yangming became popular in the world, but it was also because of them that his teaching gradually ceased to be transmitted. Wang Gen and Wang Ji often showed dissatisfaction with the teaching of their master, and attributed the secrets of Buddhism to him. They climbed up [using] Wang Yangming, and then turned [his teaching] into Chan Buddhism. When Wang Ji passed away, no disciple was superior to him. Furthermore, his teaching was saved and corrected by the Jiangyou School. Therefore, [the damage to his teaching] was not too severe. When Wang Gen had passed away, there were those who could grasp snakes

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[65] De Bary, 1959, p. 29.

[66] Ibid., p. 30.

[67] Wm Theodore de Bary, 1970, "Individualism and Humanitarianism", in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. de Bary, New York: Columbia U.P., pp. 192–193.

[68] Paul Demiéville, *La pénétration du Bouddhisme dans la tradition philosophique Chinoise,* Cahiers d'histoire mondiale, Vol 3, p. 31.

[69] Peter N. Gregory, 2002, *Tsung-mi and the sinification of Buddhism*, Honolulu: Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism, University of Hawaii Press, p. 304.

> and dragons with their bare hands, and transmitted [the teaching of Wang Gen] to Yan Shannong (Yan Jun) and He Xinyin.[70]

Huang Zongxi's criticism of Wang Ji and Wang Gen is interesting. That Wang Ji was influenced by Buddhism is not difficult to see. His reformulation of Wang Yangming's four maxims into "four forms of non-existence" shows clear Buddhist influences. Wang Yangming taught that: "Absence of good and evil characterizes the mind in itself; existence of good and evil characterizes the movement of the will; to know the difference between good and evil is innate knowledge, *liangzhi*,; to do good and avoid evil is 'investigation of things' *gewu*."[71] Wang Ji said: "If one realizes that the heart-mind is neither good nor evil, then the will, the knowledge, and the investigation of things are also characterized by absence of good and evil."[72] Wang Ji's four negations echo the fourfold negation *catuṣkoṭi* of Nagarjuna, although Wang Ji is concerned with moral questions, unlike Nagarjuna, who is interested in the ontological problem. Despite suggested Buddhist influences, Huang Zongxi is not without appreciation of either Wang Ji or Wang Gen. He even quotes Wang Yangming, admitting that Wang Ji's understanding of Wang Yangming was for men of superior understanding.[73] Unlike Wang Ji, Wang Gen was an autodidact and had not passed any level of the civil service examinations. He was more of a religious leader than a learned scholar. The ideas of Wang Gen lack the Buddhist influences we find in the teachings of Wang Ji. Monica Übelhör, who has written a monograph on Wang Gen, argues that the only Chan Buddhist traces in Wang Gen thinking are in his pedagogy.[74] The annotations in the *Complete works of Wang Xinzhai* [75] refer solely to the Confucian Classics like *Mencius*, the *Great Learning* and the *Book of Changes*. Annotations from Buddhist sutras are nowhere to be found, so how is it that Huang Zongxi accused him of Chan Buddhist influences? What kind of ideological stance did Huang Zongxi take? The question of Huang Zongxi's political convictions has been discussed by scholars like de Bary[76] and Struve.[77] During the 19th and 20th centuries, Huang Zongxi's *Mingru Xue'an* was praised as a new genre, using the anthology of primary source material as a much more scientific way to let the reader make an independent judgment about the thinker in question. Struve both questions the picture of Huang Zongxi as the pioneer of this genre, and questions Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929) and his modern agenda of "finding prototypes in China's past for just about everything that seemed modern and scientific."[78] She also argues that the transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasty exacerbated the rivalry between the idealistic School of Mind and the rationalistic School of Principle,[79] but she does not discuss Huang Zongxi's attitude towards Buddhism. However, from his political stance and the fact that he was a devout disciple of Liu Zongzhou 刘宗周 (1578–1645) it might be possible to draw some tentative conclusions about his views on the Buddhist religion. At least, it is obvious that the label Buddhist in some sense is pejorative in his writings. As a Ming loyalist, he might harbor a similar Han chauvinistic attitude to that of Han Yu, considering the Buddhist religion to be foreign and barbarian. Another hypothesis could be that to defend the Wang Yangming School, accused of facilitating the Manchu takeover, he attacked some of its more extreme proponents in order to save the main bulk of the school.[80] In the quotation above, it is obvious that the main object of his dislike was not Wang Gen himself, but were the brave men who "grasped the snakes and dragons with their bare hands," and especially their followers Yan Jun 颜鈞 (1504–1596) and He Xinyin. The most eccentric followers of the Wang Yangming School, Li Zhi and He Xinyin, are not even given biographies in the *Mingru Xue'an.* Wu Zhen has pointed out that the section about Wang Gen and his Taizhou School, the *Records of Taizhou School* (Taizhou Xue'an 泰州学案), in the *Mingru Xue'an,* does not contain the two characters for "Wang Yangming School" (*wangmen* 王门) as do all the other Schools of Wang Yangming. The reason could be that Huang Zongxi did not regard the Taizhou branch as a "true" branch of the Wang Yangming School, a view maintained by many scholars after Huang Zongxi.[81] The main problem for Huang Zongxi, and for those who followed him in criticizing Wang Gen, must have been Wang Gen's emphasis on the idea that everyone is a sage. The danger of this is that it weakens the need for self-cultivation.

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[70] Huang Zongxi, *Mingru Xue'an*, p. 703. There is a selected translation of *Mingru Xue'an* edited by Julia Ching with the collaboration of Chaoying Fang, which uses the title *The Records of Ming Scholars*, University of Hawaii Press, 1987. I am responsible for all translations from *Mingru Xue'an* in this article.

[71] Ibid., p. 237–238.

[72] Ibid., p. 238.

[73] Ibid., p. 238.

[74] Monika Übelhör, 1986, *Wang Gen (1483–1541) und seine Lehre: eine kritische Position in späten Konfuzianismus*, Reimer, Berlin, p. 118.

[75] Wang Gen, 2001, *The Complete Works of Wang Xinzhai, Wang Xinzhai Quanji*, 王心斋全集 , pp. 3–28.

[76] Wm Theodore de Bary has written about and translated Huang Zongxi's political tract 明夷待访 in *Waiting for the dawn : A plan for the prince : Huang Tsung-hsi's Ming-i-tai-fang lu*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1993.

[77] Lynn A. Struve, *Huang Zongxi in Context: A Reappraisal of His Major Writings*, The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 47, No 3, (aug. 1988, pp 474–502.)

Conclusion

The Buddhist theories of the mind and Daoist methods of meditation made Confucians like Han Yu interested in questions about the functions of the mind and different forms of meditation. This interest stimulated a new reading of Confucian classics and made the Neo-Confucians more inclined to read and comment on classics such as the *Great Learning,* the *Doctrine of the Mean,* the *Analects,* and *Mencius,* texts dealing with self-cultivation.

In the *taiji* diagram of Zhou Dunyi, certain Daoist elements became a part of his cosmology and accordingly also a part of the Neo-Confucian cosmology in general. Other Neo-Confucians, like Zhang Zai, emphasized the material force *qi,* which is associated with Daoist yoga and breathing exercises. The concept of Principles *li,* mainly associated with the Cheng brothers, was already found in Buddhism and Daoism prior to them. When Zhu Xi made a synthesis of the ideas of his predecessors about *qi* and *li,* he came very close to the philosophy of Huayan Buddhism. It is most likely that he was familiar with the Huayan philosophy preserved within the Chan Buddhist school. A common idea in Huayan and Neo-Confucianism is that every particular unit reflects the totality, and that the totality is unity and multiplicity at the same time. A consequence of this is that man as a microcosm reflects the macrocosm.

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[78] Ibid., p. 480.

[79] Ibid., p. 481.

[80] I thank Deng Zhifeng, Dept of History, Fudan University, for giving me this explanation.

[81] Wu Zhen 吴震 , *Taizhou xuepai yanjiu* 泰州学派研究 (*Research on the Taizhou School),* 2009, p. 455.

When it comes to their view of man, the traditions tend to regard desires as taking man further away from the goal of life; however, there are differing views on whether desires should be eliminated completely. The Neo-Confucians, who combine family life and responsibilities in society, tend to acknowledge emotions which do not contradict moral principles but reject passions and wild emotions. Consequently, the adherents of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism practice self-cultivation, including meditation. The goal is to calm the mind and cause the wild emotions to diminish and disappear. The Neo-Confucians have an optimistic view of man's possibility of improving himself through self-cultivation, although they admit it is difficult and takes a long time.

It is impossible to determine, who was most influenced by Buddhism, Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming. They were both influenced to a certain degree, but they adopted different parts of the Buddhist tradition. The intellectual Zhu Xi was more inclined towards Buddhist philosophy, whereas Wang Yangming, as a man of action, was naturally more attracted to Chan Buddhist praxis. The Buddhist and Daoist influences on the formation of Neo-Confucianism made the question of heresy and orthodoxy acute. During the Ming dynasty, syncretistic tendencies reached a climax. This tendency is called "the three teachings merge into one" *san jiao he yi* and was strengthened by the first emperor of Ming, who regarded the three teachings as complementary. The more a certain thinker incorporates elements from another tradition, the more anxious he is to depict himself as orthodox and the stronger his criticism of the other traditions seems to be. Han Yu, Zhu Xi, and Wang Yangming were all influenced by Buddhism and/or Daoism and at the same time they criticized these traditions in different ways. Huang Zongxi, who experienced the Manchu takeover and was a Ming loyalist, defended Wang Yangming but criticized some of his followers, the so-called "Zen wildcats," and ignored others. For him, Chan Buddhism was a pejorative label, but to determine whether he was xenophobic against the foreign Buddhist religion in the same way as Han Yu would require further investigation.

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The sound system of Nàvakat

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to describe the basic sound system of Nàvakat, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Nako village in Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh, India). This is the first attempt to describe the sound system of any Upper Kinnaur language. The analysis presented here shows that Nàvakat exhibits many features which are typically associated with Tibetan. It shows especially close affinity with the sound systems of Tibetan varieties such as Tabo and Ladakhi. In all these respects, it differs from the sound system of Sangla Kinnauri – a West Himalayish Kanauri variety spoken in Lower Kinnaur.

Keywords: Nàvakat, Tibeto-Burman, Kinnaur, Tibetan, sound system

1. Introduction: Nako village and its inhabitants

Nako is a small, high-altitude village (3 600 m above sea level) in Upper Kinnaur in the Himachal Pradesh state in India.[1] Like a green oasis amidst its immense, dry, and barren mountainous surroundings,[2] it is situated in the north-east corner of the Kinnaur district. It is about 100 km north-east of Recong Peo, the district seat of Kinnaur. It belongs administratively to the Hangrang sub-tahsil of the Poo tahsil in Kinnaur district. As Nako is located within the Restricted Zone region in India, foreign nationals are required to seek an Inner Line permit to visit this village.[3] According to the 2001 Indian census report,[4] Nako had 118 households, with a total population of 494 (236 males and 258 females). The population traditionally belongs to two social communities: the Scheduled Caste community and the Scheduled Tribe community (according to the Indian Constitution). The latter is the largest group in the village, with a total population of 454 (204 male and 250 female) (2001 census report). The Scheduled Caste community consisted of a total of 12 individuals (7 male and 5 female) (2001 census report).[5] Unlike in the Lower Kinnaur region, in Nako, both communities speak the same Tibeto-Burman language.

The village is known as *nau* among its residents. The official name of this village is "Nako", which will also be the term used here to refer to this village, following the wishes of my language consultants. Locals call their language [*nàvaká(t)*] (*nàu* 'place name' + *ká(t)* 'speech'). Its transliterated form "Nàvakat" will be used here to refer to the language of this village.[6]

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[1] I would like to thank my language consultants, and especially my main language consultant Mr. Padam Sagar, for their generosity and enormous patience. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments. The research reported on here was supported by the Swedish Research Council/SIDA project VR dnr 2007-6887.

[2] The highest peak near Nako is Leo Pargil (6 791 m).

[3] For access to areas close to the Indian border with China an Inner Line permit is required. In Kinnaur this applies to parts of Upper Kinnaur (e.g. Nako), while areas in the Lower Kinnaur region (e.g. Sangla, Recong Peo, Kalpa) do not require this permit.

[4] Source: *Census of India* online (retrieved 5 January 2011).

[5] The remaining 28 had indicated some other affiliation.

All Tibeto-Burman languages of Upper Kinnaur are in a sorry state with respect to their documentation. Even the most basic linguistic description of these languages is lacking. The language of the Nako village is mentioned only in the following works, where some data can also be found: Saxena (2011), Saxena and Borin (2011, forthcoming), and the *Comparative dictionary of Tibetan dialects* (CDTD; Bielmeier et al. in prep.).[7]

2. A linguistic description of the sound system of Nàvakat[8]

The aim of this paper is to describe the basic sound system of Nàvakat. This is the first attempt to describe the sound system of any Upper Kinnaur language. The analysis presented here is based on direct-elicited data and narratives. The direct-elicited material was primarily collected from Mr. Padam Sagar, a native of the Nako village. The narratives were collected from older Nàvakat speakers. The analysis presented here shows that Nàvakat exhibits many features which are typically associated with Tibetan. It shows especially close affinity with the sound systems of Tibetan varieties such as Tabo and Ladakhi. In all these respects, it differs from the sound system of Sangla Kinnauri – a West Himalayish Kanauri variety spoken in Lower Kinnaur.[9]

2.1 Consonants

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b	t d	ʈ ɖ		k g	
Aspirated plosive	pʰ	tʰ	ʈʰ		kʰ	
Nasal	m	n		ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative		s z		ʃ ʒ[10]		h
Affricate		ts dz		tʃ dʒ		
Aspirated affricate		tsʰ		tʃʰ		
Lateral		l				
Trill		r				
Approximant	ʋ			j		

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[6] When interacting with people from outside Kinnaur, Nako villagers refer to themselves as *kínɔra* or as *kínɔri*. When they communicate with people who are from Middle and Lower Kinnaur, they communicate in Hindi and describe themselves as belonging to the *Nako* village. But when they communicate with people from Upper Kinnaur, they refer to themselves as *nàova* and their village as *nàu*.

[7] I express my deepest gratitude to Roland Bielmeier for providing me access to his CDTD database (Bielmeier et al. in prep.).

[8] The abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: 1SG = first person singular pronoun, 2SG.NHON = second person non-honorific pronoun, 3SG.NHON = third person non-honorific pronoun, HON = honorific, INTR = intransitive, PFV = perfective and TR = transitive.

[9] West Himalayish is a sister subgroup of Tibetic (or Tibetan) in the Tibeto-Kinnauri branch of Tibeto-Burman, and Kanauri is one of four branches under West Himalayish, according to both the *Ethnologue* (Lewis 2009) and DeLancey (1985).

[10] The articulation of [ʃ] actually varies between [ʃ] and [ʂ]. The same is the case concerning the articulation of [ʒ].

Illustrations of consonant pairs

/p/ : /b/	*pénba*	‘Saturday’	*bámba*	‘lamp’
/p/: /pʰ/	*páŋ*	‘tree’	*pʰáŋ*	‘spindle’
/t/ : /d/	*tà*	‘now’	*dàtʃa*	‘to chase’
/t/ : /ʈ/	*tá*	‘stallion’	*ʈá*	‘hair (head)’
/ʈ/ : /ɖ/	*ʈàŋmo*	‘cold’	*ɖùmpo*	‘thick (with round objects)’
/tʰ/ : /ʈʰ/	*tʰúkpa*	‘soup (traditional)’	*ʈʰúkpa*	‘quarrel’
/k/ : kʰ/	*káŋba*	‘leg’	*kʰáŋba*	‘house’
/s/ : /ʃ/	*sáktʃa*	‘to collect, to hoard’	*ʃáʃa̖*	‘to tear (TR)’
/tʃ/ : /dʒ/	*tʃɛ́ŋa*	‘fifteen’	*dʒɛŋgu*	‘green’
/tʃ/ : /tʃʰ/	*tʃú*	‘ten’	*tʃʰú*	‘water’
/k/ : /g/	*kúnma*	‘thief’	*gùnga*	‘winter’
/ts/ : /dz/	*tsáktʃa*	‘to sieve, to strain’	*ⁿdzàktʃa*	‘to climb’
/ts/ : /tsʰ/	*tsá*	‘bottom’	*tsʰám*	‘meditation’
/s/ : /tsʰ/	*sá*	‘grass, vein’	*tsʰá*	‘salt’
/s/ : /ʒ/	*sè(r)tʃa*	‘to say’	*ʒè(t)tʃa*	‘to forget’
/ts/ : /tʃ/	*tsán*	‘nest’	*tʃàm*	‘north’
/m/ : /n/	*má*	‘wound’	*ná*	‘nose’
/n/ : /ŋ/	*ná*	‘nose’	*ŋá*	‘five’
/m/ : /ŋ/	*mán*	‘medicine’	*ŋán*	‘early’
/n/ : /ɲ/	*nám*	‘sky’	*ɲámbo*	‘together’
/m/ : /ŋ/	*nàm*	‘when’	*nàŋ*	‘inside’
/r/ : /l/	*ràma*	‘goat’	*làm*	‘path’

The word-final stops seem to be slowly disappearing in Nàvakat. They are either realized as a voiceless stop or they remain unreleased. For this reason the word-final stops are presented within parentheses “()” in the examples. At the present stage of its development though, it is still possible to identify the word-final consonant in slow speech and, when asked, the language consultants were able to identify the consonant. When the same stop occurs in initial or medial position, it is articulated more clearly. In a very few cases, the loss of a final stop correlates with a compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel, e.g., *tʃáː* ‘iron’ vs. *tʃáktʰa(p)* ‘fireplace made of iron’.

gjè(t)	‘eight’	*tʃála(k)*	‘thing’
jò(p)	‘many (countable)’	*gjè(p)*	‘behind’

The final consonant in recent loanwords is, however, articulated more clearly. For example, *ìːnʈ* ‘brick’ (Indo-Aryan loanword), *bɛ̀lʈ* ‘(modern) belt’.

Nàvakat retroflex consonants are not distinctly retroflex. This seems to be the reason why they often are perceived as alveolar stops. Furthermore, they are sometimes perceived as one segment (a retroflex consonant), but at other times as a sequence of two segments – an alveolar stop followed by an [r].[11] The latter is indicated as “(r)” in examples. For example, *ʈ(r)ò* ‘wheat’, *ⁿɖ(r)ùl* ‘snake’.

Similarly, although aspiration is phonemic in Nàvakat, the intensity of the aspiration is relatively low. Even Indo-Aryan loanwords containing aspiration, e.g., *bʰagvaːn* ‘god’, *bʰaːlaː* ‘spear’, are pronounced with only a slight aspiration.

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[11] In many cases, this reflects their historical origin in consonant clusters.

An alternation between [p], [pʰ] and [b]; [t], [tʰ] and [d]; and [ʈ], [ʈʰ] and [ɖ] is found when the consonant occurs word-initially and the first syllable has a low tone. For example, *bàl ~ pʰàl ~ pàl* ‘wool’, *bètlu ~ pʰètlu ~ pètlu* ‘manner’, *bɛ̀ma ~ pʰɛ̀ma ~ pɛ̀ma* ‘sand’, *bètʃa ~ pʰètʃa ~ pètʃa* ‘to do’, *dùtpa ~ tʰùtpa ~ tùtpa* ‘to smoke’.

2.2 Prenasalization

There are some instances of prenasalization in Nàvakat.

Minimal pairs: Prenasalization

dàmdʒa	‘to tie’	*ⁿdàmdʒa*	‘selection’
dàʈʃa	‘to chase’	*ⁿdàʈʃa*	‘to chew’
tʰỳ(t)pa, t(ʰ)ù(t)pa	‘smoke’	*ⁿdỳʈpa*	‘knot’
dỳn, dùn	‘seven’	*ⁿdỳn, (ⁿ)dùn*	‘front’

2.3 Vowels

Short vowels:

i (y)	(ʉ)	u
e (ø)		o
	a	

Long vowels:

i: (y:)	(ʉ:)	u:
e: (ø:)		o:
	a:	

Illustration of vowels

/i/ : /e/	*kírkir*	‘round (small objects)’	*kérker*	‘standing position’
/e/ : /a/	*tʃʰétpo*	‘big’	*tʃátpa*	‘penalty’
/a/ : /o/	*kʰá*	‘mouth’	*kʰó*	‘3SG.NHON’
/o/ : /u/	*só*	‘tooth’	*sú*	‘who’
/i/ : /u/	*tʃí(k)*	‘word’	*tù(k)*	‘poison’

The status of [y], [ʉ] and [ø] in Nàvakat is unclear. There are no minimal pairs found in my database. As the following examples illustrate, the front and central rounded vowels mostly occur, when they are followed by [t], [d], [r], [n], and [l]. In some cases these non-back rounded vowels and the back rounded vowel occur as two possible variants.

tỳ(t)pa, tù(t)pa	‘smoke’	*ⁿdỳtpa*	‘knot’
ⁿɖỳl, ⁿɖùl	‘snake’	*lʉ̀(t)pa, lù(t)pa*	‘cough’
bòenʉ(t)	‘womb’	*sʉ́rtu(p), súrtuː(p)*	‘ring’
ɖʉ̀lma, dɔ̀lma	‘a name’	*sʉ́r, súr*	‘piece’
sʉ̀r, sùr	‘corner’	*kʰǿ(t)*	‘2SG.NHON’
kárjøl	‘cup’	*tʃʰǿdʉn*	‘a girl’s name’
nǿnpo, nɔ́npɔ	‘sharp, pointed’	*nòtʃʉn, nòtʃun*	‘younger brother’
sáŋʉn, sáŋɔn	‘seed’	*sɛ̀ʋʉn, sɛ̀ʋʊn*	‘itch’

There are, however, also some cases where the front and central rounded vowels occur, even though the vowels are not followed by one of the aforementioned consonants.

gø̀emo, gòemo	‘night’	*kø̀ela(k), kòela(k)*	‘cloth’
tʃʰǿe	‘religion’	*lèdʉi, lèdui*	‘initiation ceremony’
gjùʒa	‘to have sex’	*matsʰǿva, matʃɔ́ɛva*	‘unripe’

There is free variation between close-mid and open-mid vowels.

lép, lɛ́p	‘arrive (HON)’	*tʃʰétpo , tʃʰɛ́tpɔ*	‘big’
só , sɔ́	‘tooth’	*zòʒa, zɔ̀ʒa*	‘to make’

Length is phonemic in Nàvakat.

kʰá	‘mouth’	*kʰáː*	‘snow’
gà	‘saddle’	*gàː*	‘better’
ná	‘nose’	*náː*	‘day after tomorrow’
lù	‘music’	*lùː*	‘tradition, custom’

Apart from this, there are also instances where a sequence of two vowels appears. Some vowel combinations found in the dataset are as follows:

[au]	*bàu*	‘teacher’	[eu]	éu	‘breast’
[iu]	*líu*	‘flute’	[oa]	bòa	‘foam’

Finally, the vowel preceding a nasal is often nasalized in Nàvakat, but nasalization is not phonemic.[12]

ʃáktaːn, ʃáktãː	‘everyday’	*gùã, gòã*	‘egg’
tã(ŋ)	‘PFV’	*tʃʰúrgãː*	‘blister’

2.4. Tone

Tone is phonemic in Nàvakat in that there are minimal pairs where the only distinguishing linguistic feature is the tonal distinction. Such pairs display a difference in intonation as well as in pitch, with the vowels with a low tone displaying a falling-rising tonal contour and the vowels with a high or neutral tone exhibiting a level tonal contour.

Minimal pairs: Tone

làm	‘path’	*lám*	‘shoe’
nàm	‘when’	*nám*	‘sky’
mà	‘1SG’	*má*	‘wound’
ŋà	‘1SG’	*ŋá*	‘five’

In the following instances the difference in transitivity is indicated by means of tone:

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[12] In cases where the nasalization is predictable (i.e. with vowels preceding a nasal consonant), it is not marked in the examples.

kòndʒa	‘to put on (INTR)’	*kóndʒa*	‘to put on (TR)’
kùktʃa	‘to bend (INTR)’	*kúktʃa*	‘to bend (TR)’
ʃàːʃa	‘to blow (INTR)’	*ʃáːʃa*	‘to blow (TR)’
lùktʃa	‘to untie (INTR)’	*lúktʃa*	‘to untie (TR)’

At the same time, the tonal distinction is predictable to a large extent. This is consistent with the correlates of the tonal distinctions found in Tibetan; i.e., the main tonal distinction is found only in the first syllable, where plain nasals and liquids correlate with low tone, but nasals and liquids with preradicals correlate with high tone (Huang 1995; Zeisler 2004: 250–257). Vowels following word-initial voiced consonants tend to have low tone. A slight aspiration on the first syllable correlates with the presence of the low tone.[13] The tone of the first vowel determines the tone of the following syllable. While the tonal distinction is distinctly audible in lexical items when spoken in isolation, in free speech the tonal differences are not so distinct; instead the main distinctive feature is primarily the tonal contour.[14]

3. Conclusion

In short, the sound system of Nàvakat exhibits many features which are typically associated with the sound system of Tibetan (see Huang 1995). It shows especially close affinity with the sound systems of Tibetan varieties such as Tabo and Ladakhi (Zeisler 2011; Bielmeier et al. in prep.). On the other hand, it differs substantially from the sound system of Sangla Kinnauri – a West Himalayish Kanauri variety spoken in Lower Kinnaur. This is consistent with the findings presented by Saxena (2011) and Saxena and Borin (2011), where a systematic lexical and grammatical comparison of a number of Tibetan and West Himalayish varieties clearly showed that the three Upper Kinnauri varieties Poo, Kuno, and Nàvakat are much closer linguistically to Tabo and Ladakhi than to Sangla Kinnauri or other Tibeto-Burman languages of Lower and Middle Kinnaur.

While the *Ethnologue* (Lewis 2009) classifies the Upper Kinnaur Poo variety – and presumably also Nàvakat – as Bhoti Kinnauri, a West Himalayish Kanauri variety close to Sangla Kinnauri, the findings presented here and in our earlier investigations are strongly consistent with the proposals concerning the genetic relationship of these languages (e.g., Bailey 1909) which suggest that Nàvakat (and also the Tibeto-Burman varieties of Poo and Kuno) should be classified as Tibetan rather than West Himalayish Kanauri varieties.

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[13] Some phonological correlates to tone split noted in Sino-Tibetan languages are: breathy voice, prenasalization, fortis and lenis articulation of consonants, vowel length, and tenseness (Hombert 1978).

[14] Similar observations have also been made for the Ladakhi varieties Gya and Shara (Zeisler 2011).

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Book Reviews

Behrooz Barjasteh Delforooz. *Discourse Features in Balochi of Sistan (Oral Narratives.* (Studia Iranica Upsaliensia 15), 2011. ISBN 978-91-554-7870-4. Revised edition, online at http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?searchId=2&pid=diva2:345413.

The above file contains a comprehensive revision of the pre-defence version of Behrooz Barjasteh's doctoral dissertation which was published by Uppsala University in 2010. It has not only corrected nearly all the typographical errors found in the original document, but also presents a clearer and much more convincing analysis of a number of discourse features of the variety of Balochi (a member of "the so-called north-western group of Iranian languages" – p. 19) spoken in Iranian and Afghani Sistan.

Chapter 1 includes a historical survey of the Baloch of Sistan (hereafter, BS), discussion of the relation of Balochi to other Iranian languages, reference to six major Balochi dialects, information about previous research on the language, and an outline of the way in which the vowels and consonants have been transcribed in the dissertation. The number of Balochi speakers in 2010 was estimated to be "up to 7 to 10 millions" (p. 22).

"Discourse analysis investigates … the properties that make for well-formed texts in a language" (p. 4). The dissertation follows the functional and cognitive approach to discourse analysis described in Dooley and Levinsohn (2001) and applied to Persian by Roberts (2009).

Chapter 2 concerns the "Discourse-Pragmatic Structuring of Sentences" (p. 29). The default order of constituents in BS is subject–object–verb, with adverbials found in a variety of positions, including post-verbally. Three basic articulations of the sentence are identified: topic-comment, "focus-presupposition" (Andrews 1985:77) or identificatory, and "thetic" (Lambrecht 1994:138). There follows a discussion of "left-dislocated elements and points of departure" (p. 37), most of which are pre-nuclear adverbial constituents, though sentence-initial vocatives are also covered, as are "short replies" (p. 51) such as 'Yes' and 'No' and exclamatory words such as 'Oh'. Among elements that are right-dislocated are "vocatives, tails, and adverbials" (p. 52). Section 2.3.4 considers the position of relative clauses and notes that those that are pre-verbal are usually restrictive (p. 55), whereas only non-restrictive ones have been found after the verb, "to give emphatic prominence to the new information" that they convey (p. 56).

Section 2.4, "Order of Constituents in the Clause" (p. 58), includes discussion of marked orders such as post-verbal subjects ("when they are focal" – p. 66); post-verbal objects (some "de-emphasised in the discourse context" [p. 67], some in contrastive focus and others of a clarificatory nature); and preposed objects. When the preposing of an object violates the "Principle of Natural Information Flow" (Comrie 1989:127f) by placing non-established information before established information, this "has a contrastive or highlighting function" (p. 68).

Chapter 3, "The Relative Informational Prominence of the Sentences of a Text" (p. 73), concerns foreground versus background information. Most relevant for narrative is the distinction between non-events (automatically of a background nature, although they may be highlighted) and events (presumed to be foreground unless otherwise marked; e.g., by subordination). Foreground information in BS narrative is typically in the simple past tense, with perfective aspect and realis mood. In turn, present, perfect or pluperfect tense suggests that the events concerned are backgrounded (p. 113), as, to a lesser extent, does the use of irrealis mood and imperfective aspect (p. 110 notes a past continuous, negative event that is labelled foreground).

Although discussion of foreground and background in BS occupies 35 pages, I felt that the grounds for the distinction were highly subjective. Of more interest were the paragraphs on the "historical present" (p. 104) and "the mirative particle *ta*" (p. 105) – topics that feature also in sec. 3.3 on highlighting devices. Most instances of the historical present involve verbs that introduce reported speech, by means of which "the narrator points forward to the events that result from the conversation" (p. 104). Mirative *ta* presents "information from the point of view of the person who perceives it" (p. 105), such as "unexpected events or situations" (p. 104), and highlights it (p. 114). Other highlighting devices include "tail-head linkage" ("the repetition in a subordinate clause, at the beginning [the 'head'] of a new sentence, of at least the main verb of the previous sentence [the tail]" – Dooley & Levinsohn 2001:16), and the posing of a question which the narrator immediately answers "to highlight what is going to happen next" (p. 117). The combination of "the past form of the existential verb in third singular *būt* … 'it so happened'" and an adverbial clause of time is also used to "slow down the narrative and highlight the content of the unit" (*ibid.*), as do "the adverbs *nūn* 'now' and *bass* 'just, just then, immediately'" (p. 118).

Chapter 3 ends with discussion of two devices for the "[h]ighlighting of a topic" (p. 121): separating the subject from the rest of the sentence by means of a 'spacer' such as the subordinator *ki* or the topicaliser *=u*. This section is out of place, as it does not involve the highlighting of sentences. Indeed, topics marked by *=u* often serve "to set off a later constituent to advantage by contrast" (Levinsohn 2011a:63), so may well be backgrounded in relation to the topic with which they contrast. As for the examples containing *ki*, I suspect that both can be re-interpreted as pre-nuclear subordinate clauses, backgrounded in relation to what follows.

Chapter 4 concerns deixis: "the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance" (Lyons 1977:637). The section on time deixis (involving "the encoding of temporal points and spans relative to the time at which an utterance was spoken [or written message inscribed]" – Levinson 1983:62) includes discussion of the general deictic *nūn* 'now', and of specific deictics such as *mrōčī/marōčī* 'today', all of which "can be used both with direct reference in the speech event and with indirect reference to the report of the event" (p. 131). Among the functions of *nūn* that are discussed is its use "as a reorientation marker" (p. 130).

BS has a three-way system of place and time deixis, which is described in terms of distance from the speaker (*i-* "proximal", *ō-* "mediate" and *a-* "remote distal" – pp. 139*f*). However, the proximal deictic can also refer to the current centre of attention, which allows a speaker to say, 'Let's go *here*' (denoting a nearby house), rather than 'Let's go there' (p. 145).

The deictic centre for the BS verbs for 'come' and 'go' in stories may be the location of the central character in the story, rather than that of the storyteller. Consequently, the deictic centre may change as the central character moves location, with other participants *coming* to him, wherever he is currently located (p. 146). The verb *ātin* 'come' can also be used prospectively to represent an event that is about to take place (the equivalent of English *go* in 'he was going to throw it') (p. 148).

Demonstratives in BS are proximal (*ē/ēš*) or distal (*ā*). *Ēš* may be used "objectively" (for a visible referent), anaphorically or cataphorically (p. 159, notwithstanding a claim to the contrary on p. 151). *Ā* is used objectively or anaphorically, but not cataphorically (*contra* p. 155). When anaphoric, some other participant or prop is the current centre of attention (p. 156). This raises the possibility that, when the distal *spatial* demonstrative is used anaphorically, its referent is not so much "very far" away (p. 142), as located other than at the current centre of attention.

Chapter 5 concerns “logical relations between propositions” and, in particular, “the pragmatic functions of the most commonly used conjunctions in BS oral narrative texts” (p. 161). Conjunctions are classified as coordinating (associative, disjunctive [‘or’, ‘either’…‘or’] and additive);[1] adversatives (including *maga* “a limiting particle with countering overtones” – p. 193); “purpose, reason and result connectives” (p. 200), most of which include the general subordinator *ki* (see footnote 3); and those “that constrain a developmental interpretation” (p. 205).

In the section on adversatives, a useful distinction is made between the function of *amā*, which “indicates that what follows does not represent a new development in the argument”, and *walē*, which “signals a new development” (p. 185).

Developmental connectives “constrain the hearer to move on to the next point” (Dooley & Levinsohn 2001:93). Four sets of BS connectives are judged to be developmental (p. 205): *āxir/āxar, āxirā/ āxarā, bilaxara* ‘finally, in the end, at last’; *gurā* and *bād* (“a loan word from Arabic through Persian” – p. 208) ‘then, after that, next’; *bass* ‘just, just then, immediately after that’; and the reorientation particle *xayr* ‘well’.

The author acknowledges that there sometimes is no connective (p. 161) and, on page 184, states that the most frequent way to introduce adversative material is without any connective. However, he does not discuss other circumstances under which no connective is present.

While the stated interest of the chapter is in *pragmatic* functions, discussion of each connective is subdivided according to the *semantic* relation between the clauses or sentences that it links. So, for example, the associative connective *wa/=u/(=)ō* ‘and’ is illustrated “in chronological sequence” (p. 162), “as simple coordination” (p. 166), “with result orientation” (p. 167) and “in adversative contexts” (p. 168). Although the author is careful to state, for instance, “that it can also associate propositions that are in contrast with each other” (*ibid*.), there is still the danger that the reader will focus on the semantic relations that are being illustrated, rather than on the pragmatic constraint on interpretation (in this case, to associate what follows with what has just been stated and treat it as part of the same ‘package’). In this connection, the sentence that concludes chapter 5, “We show that most of these connectives have a wide range of discourse functions in BS oral narrative texts” (p. 214) is unfortunate. It would be more accurate to state that they are found in a wide range of discourse *contexts*, since the constraint on interpretation that each imposes remains the same, whatever the context.

Chapter 6, “Represented speech in narratives”, begins by noting, “In BS the speech orienters [such as ‘John said’] mostly occur before the reported speech, but there are some instances of their occurrence in the middle and after the speech” (p. 215). Unfortunately, “[t]here are insufficient instances of speech orienters occurring in the middle or after the speech to determine whether the narrator uses this construction to show a special function such as highlighting either the speaker or the addressee” (p. 218). “Sometimes the orienters are completely omitted when the direct speeches are narrated in a dramatic way by the narrator” (*ibid*.).

“In BS oral texts nearly all reported speeches are direct which means that direct speech is the default” way of reporting speech in the language (p. 221). Only two instances of indirect speech were found in the corpus, both of which were embedded in direct speech (p. 222). A small number of examples of “a third kind of reporting which shows features of direct and indirect speech” (p. 224) also appeared in the corpus.

Much of chapter 6 concerns direct speech introduced with the particle *ki*.[2] Roberts (2009: 295, 300) had claimed for Persian that the “clause linkage marker” “*ke* is used primarily in spoken texts to give prominence to speeches that the author considers are important to the story”. In the pre-defence version of his dissertation, Barjasteh had likewise suggested that, when BS *ki* introduces a direct speech, it “has a highlighting function. … The marked speeches push the story forward to its goal” (2010:224). This claim is corrected in the online version, which now claims that, when *ki* introduces a reported speech in BS, it is the *consequences* of the speech that are highlighted, rather than the speech itself. In particular, “when a question is answered, the answer is usually more important than the question, which is why the effect of marking a question with *ki* is to highlight the answer” (p. 227). Furthermore, *ki* may introduce a speech, not to highlight anything, but to indicate that its words *represent* the gist of what one or more people said, are to say or could have said, rather than being uttered on a particular occasion (p. 229).[3]

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[1] Additives are usually thought of as **ad**junctions, rather than **con**junctions, since the information they link is often in non-continguous clauses or sentences.

[2] The final section of chapter 6 also contains some observations about references to reported speakers. This is covered below in connection with the discussion of chapter 7.

Chapter 7 concerns forms of reference to participants in narratives as they are introduced to the story and as they continue to feature in it. It begins with a discussion of the different ways of activating major participants, minor participants and props (“[n]on-human or human entities which are less prominent or inanimate participants around the scenery of the story and which do not interact in any way with the other participants” – p. 250). As in many languages, the cardinal number for one (*yakk*) appears to “indicate that the referent concerned is salient to the development of the story” (p. 244). It is used, where appropriate, in addition to the indefinite clitic *=e* (e.g. *yakk kass=ē* ‘a certain person’).

The rest of chapter 7 concerns further reference to activated participants, with particular reference to two of the texts that feature in Appendix 2 (see below). When a third person subject remains the same between clauses or sentences, the default encoding is “zero anaphora” (p. 253). When the addressee of one reported speech becomes the speaker for the next, the default encoding is a pronominal enclitic (PC). For all other changes of subject, the default encoding is a noun.

When the encoding material is more than the default, it typically signals a new development in the story or marks the beginning of a new discourse unit or the climax. It can also highlight the action or the speech concerned. In some cases the referent might be a marked topic. When the encoding material is less than the default, the referent is often a major participant. (p. 278)

The author concludes chapter 7 by noting, “Further research is needed to determine when the PC is absent with transitive verbs in the past” (*ibid.*). In the months after the revised dissertation was posted, we were able to undertake further research, so it seems appropriate to include the conclusions we had reached by the time the 4th International Conference on Iranian Linguistics (ICIL 4) took place at Uppsala University in June 2011. They are as follows:

Firstly, analysis of the distribution of the two realisations of the third person singular has revealed the following conditioning, which is partly phonological and partly morphological:

- When the PC is **non-final** in a clause (it is followed by another constituent within the same clause), the norm is for ***=ē*** to be used.
- When ***=ē*** is attached to the **final** verb of an independent clause, the referent is usually the undergoer.
- When ***=ī*** is attached to the **final** verb of an independent clause, the referent is usually the agent.[4]

One consequence of the above distribution is that, when the subject is stated but ***=ī*** is also present, ***=ī*** still refers to the subject/agent.

Secondly, the synchronic motivation for using the third person PC is to indicate ‘referent continuity’ (Givón 1990:827). In particular, its presence implies the ongoing involvement in the expected role of any active third person participant who is not identified by a noun or independent pronoun in the current clause. It even has the same effect when an active participant in the expected role is identified. So, when only one participant is on stage, as when someone is talking to him/herself, the PC indicates that the same participant continues as subject. When two participants are interacting and neither is identified in the current clause, then it is to be understood that both of them continue to be active in their expected roles. When the undergoer is identified, then the PC indicates that the agent is the other active participant (unless it is a final =*ē*). Conversely, when the agent is identified, then the PC indicates that the undergoer is the other active participant (unless it is a final =*ī*).

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[3] See Levinsohn (2011b) for the claim that *ki* functions as “an explicit linguistic indicator of interpretive use” (Blass 1990:104), not only when introducing a reported speech, but also in other constructions.

[4] This finding may be taken as confirmation of Agnes Korn’s suggestion that “some clitics in Western Iranian languages may derive from the OIr. accusative forms”, rather than all deriving “from the genitive/dative ones of Old Iranian” (2009:159).

Finally, the absence of the PC when the potential referents are active and in their expected roles suggests a certain lack of cohesion in the discourse. By omitting the PC, the speech concerned is set off from its context, which, under certain circumstances, has the effect of highlighting the speech concerned.

Chapter 8, "General Conclusions" (pp. 279–282), is followed by an Appendix of 100 pages of interlinearised text (including, in the published dissertation, a CD that reproduces the original recounting of the ten stories) . Shading indicates the presence of direct reported speech and interactions between the storyteller and his audience. My only complaint about this extremely valuable resource is that clauses have been numbered consecutively, instead of sentences. As a result, the reader has to rely on the punctuation of the free translation to discover where the sentence breaks occur.

Notwithstanding the critical remarks that have appeared from time to time in the above paragraphs, I commend Dr. Barjasteh's online dissertation to you as a valuable source of information not only about discourse features of oral narratives in Balochi of Sistan, but also as an excellent starting point for discourse studies of other Iranian languages.

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Martin Delhey. *Samāhitā Bhūmiḥ*. Das Kapitel über die meditative Versenkung im Grundteil der Yogācārabhūmi. Teil 1-2. Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, 2009: 521 Sn. (WSTBK, Heft 73,1-2). ISBN 978-3-902501-11-0.

Die meditative Versenkung ist ein essentieller Teil früher indischer Lehren. Dies ist schon für die Zeit der älteren Upaniṣads nachweisbar. Weder in der brahmanischen noch in der buddhistischen Welt vorchristlicher Zeit war es denkbar, das eigene Heilsziel ohne meditative Versenkung zu erreichen. Mehr noch: In der Versenkung selbst realisierte sich das Heilsziel. Erörterungen dieses Themas bildeten den Stoff für Weiterentwicklungen und sorgfältige Ausarbeitungen der Lehr- und Erfahrungsinhalte religiöser Schultraditionen. Trotz der unterschiedlichen Verzweigungen der buddhistischen Gemeinde nach dem Tod des historischen Buddha und der Vielfalt der Weltanschauungen wurde u.a. auch in den späten Mahāyānaschulen wie dem Yogācāra oder dem Madhyamaka nicht auf die frühen Darstellungen der Meditation verzichtet. Somit bildeten altkanonische Lehren in späterer Zeit einen wichtigen Bestandteil der philosophischen Traditionen in ihrer Auslegung und Aus-bildung überlieferter buddhistischer Lehrtraditionen.

Um einen solchen Fall handelt es sich bei dem Textpassus *Samāhitā Bhūmiḥ* [SamBh], der als integraler Bestandteil der *Yogācārabhūmi*, einem umfangreichen anonymen Sammelwerk des Buddhismus, überliefert wurde. Da die *Yogācārabhūmi* ein Grundlagenwerk des Yogācāra ist, in dem grundlegende Konzepte der Tradition, wie *ālayavijñāna*, *trisvabhāva, bījā* und *vāsanā, vijñaptimātra* usw., enthalten sind, und da auf Positionen des Śrāvaka, Pratyekabuddha, Elemente des frühen Buddhismus, und der Bodhisattva-Lehre rekuriert wird, stellt sie einen Markstein in der frühen Entwicklung des Mahāyāna-Buddhismus dar. Die *Samāhitā Bhūmiḥ* gehört in diesem Kompendium inhaltlich zum konservativen Buddhismus. Dessen Heilsge-danken äußerten sich im Wunsch nach Erlangen der Befreiung von jeglichem leidhaften Dasein. Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, wurden u.a. unterschiedliche Versenkungstechniken gepriesen, weltlicher wie überweltlicher Art. Die SamBh befasst sich hauptsächlich mit diesem weiten Gebiet buddhistischer Meditation.

Die Erschließung der SamBh war lange ein Desideratum der Forschung. Sie ist umso mehr begrüßenswert, da Fragen, ob die *Yogācārabhūmi* ein einheitlich redigiertes Werk sei oder ob sie eine historisch gewachsene heterogene Kompilation sei, bisher nicht befriedigend beantwortet werden konnten. Die SamBh könnte zudem auch Hinweise zur Entschlüsselung der Entwicklung des frühen Buddhismus liefern.

Martin Delhey entschloss sich zu einer Weiterführung seiner Magisterarbeit und plante im Rahmen eines Dissertationsvorhabens die erweiterte Erschließung der *Samāhitā Bhūmi*. Hierfür nutzte er eine umfangreiche Quellenlage, die auch die Überlieferungen der SamBh in Sanskrit, Tibetisch oder Chinesisch umfasste, darüber hinaus auch jeweils einen chinesischen und einen koreanischen Kommentar zur *Yogācārabhūmi,* die der *Samāhitā Bhūmi* gewidmet sind.

Der Schwerpunkt der Arbeit – wohl aufgrund der umfangreichen Quellenlage – ist zum einen die Rekonstruktion der Textüberlieferung und zum anderen das Bemühen um die kritische Ausgabe ausgewählter Textzeugen mit einer diplomatischen und kritischen Edition.

Eine kurze Einführung in die Problematik der wissenschaftlichen Erschließung, ein Überblick über den Forschungsstand und die Formulierung der eigenen Aufgabenstellung, eine inhaltliche Analyse des Textes, einige Bemerkungen zur Kompositionsgeschichte und literaturgeschichtlichen Einordnung, eine Darstellung der Textzeugen samt ihrer Eigentümlichkeiten und eine Erklärung der Methoden und Konventionen editorischen Arbeitens füllen den größten Teil des ersten Bandes. Abgerundet wird diese Einführung von einem Editionsteil, der hauptsächlich aus der kritischen Edition der SamBh auf der Grundlage einer Sanskrithandschrift besteht und von einem Quellen- und Testimonienapparat ergänzt wird. Auch der zweite Band ist zum größten Teil gefüllt mit editorischen Bemühungen um die Quellen, eine diplomatische Edition der SamBh und eine Edition der tibetischen Textzeugen. Im Zentrum der Arbeit des

Autors steht die philologische Erschließung der SamBh. Einige wenige Zeilen einer Teilübersetzung ins Deutsche, begleitet von umfangreichen Anmerkungen, gewähren einen Einblick in den Duktus des Textes. Um auf den Gesamttext schließen zu können, sind aber zu wenige Zeilen übersetzt. Eine Struktur- und Inhaltsanalyse, eine voluminöse Bibliografie samt Abkürzungsverzeichnis und zwei Indizes, ein General- und ein Stellenindex, schließen den zweiten Band ab.

Was beinhaltet die SamBh? In ihr wird die Ebene der meditativen Versenkung behandelt. Es werden vier meditative Vertiefungen (*dhyāna*) aufgelistet, die acht Befreiungen (*vimokṣa*), die meditativen Versenkungen (*samādhi*) und die meditativen Erreichungen (*samāpatti*). Deren nähere Bestimmung, die Unterteilung der Betrachtungsakte und die Unterteilung der Erscheinungen werden vorgestellt und schließlich wird eine ausführliche Zusammenfassung der buddhistischen Lehrreden wiedergegeben – alles in allem bekannte Themen aus der frühen buddhistischen Tradition.

Die Arbeit Delheys zeigt das ernsthafte Bemühen um ein Durchdringen der textlichen Lage der *Samāhitā Bhūmiḥ*. Der interessierte Leser kann sich schon vorab anhand eines Inhaltsverzeichnisses orientieren; Allgemeinplätze in der Formulierung von Titel- und Untertiteln, zum Beispiel „einige Bemerkungen zu…“ oder „weitere Bemerkungen…“, sind jedoch nicht informativ.

Überzeugend ist Delheys Recherche zu den Textzeugen und die intensive Aufarbeitung vor-hergegangener Arbeiten. Die Verfahren, die er zur Wiedergabe der „Originalquellen“ und der hypothetischen Rekonstruktion des Textes wählt, sind hinlänglich bekannt und angewendet worden. Eine reichhaltige Kommentierung der gewählten Lesarten hält seine Arbeit transparent und belohnt jeden, der sich damit näher auseinandersetzen will. Die Angaben zur diplomatischen Edition hätten gestrafft werden können, denn mehrdeutige Angaben wie „Geschmiere im unteren Bereich“ oder „Schmierflecken“ sind ohne Relevanz für die Sicherstellung von Lesarten. Des Weiteren bleiben manche seiner Erwägungen leider, wie es jedoch wohl die Textlage auch nicht anders zulässt, im Bereich der Vermutungen stecken.

In seinen Erörterungen changiert Delhey zwischen Alltagssprache, Wissenschaftssprache oder Erzählsprache. Zudem wählte er für seine 2009 erschienene Publikation die alte deutsche Rechtschreibung, die schon im Jahr 2006 abgeschafft wurde. Delheys Verwendung der unter anderem auch aus den Schriften Schmithausens bekannten Begrifflichkeit wie „Gemütsversenkung“, „Nicht-Vorstellung“, „Nicht-Nahrung“, „Nicht-Verunreinigt-werden“, „Nicht-Hervorbringen“, „Lebewesentöter“, „Einschrumpfung des Geistes“ oder „Nichtbetrachtung“ usw., zeigt eine gewisse Unbeholfenheit im Ausdruck. Für ein Verständnis des Gemeinten sind diese Wortschöpfungen weder im wissenschaftlichen Text noch in der Übersetzung förderlich. Zudem weist sie eine Unfähigkeit zur philosophischen Reflektion auf. Auch so manche Übersetzung ist verfehlt. Z. B. *Übelwollen* (*vyāpāda*) mit *Ärger* (*āghāta*) auf eine Stufe zu stellen, ist fragwürdig; besser wäre, auch im Sinne der Erklärungen der SamBh, *malicious feeling* oder *bösartige Gesinnung* für *āghāta* anzusetzen.

Viele kleinere Fehler unter anderem der Rechtschreibung und Zitierweise, ungenaue Angaben usw. schmälern diese Arbeit. Auch ist Delheys Vorgehensweise fragwürdig, der Bibliografie einer Dissertation Anfängerwerke beizufügen. Der Nutzen dieser Werke wird für die Arbeit nicht ersichtlich, vielmehr wird die Geduld des an einer Facharbeit interessierten Lesers auf die Probe gestellt.

Eine Abbildung einiger *akṣaras*, handschriftlich dargestellt oder als Abbildungen des Manuskripts, wäre hilfreich gewesen, um Delheys Argumentation zu § 8.2.2 *Datierung und Entstehungsort der Handschrift* besser nachvollziehen zu können.

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Geoffrey L. J. Haig. *Alignment Change in Iranian Languages. A Construction Grammar Approach*. (Empirical Approaches to Language Typology, 37). Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, ix + 367 pp., 2008. ISBN 978-3-11-019586-6.

Ergativity and the possible origin and later developments of ergative alignment, or as Haig prefers to call it, "tense-sensitive alignment (TSA)" (see, e.g., p. 9) in Iranian languages has attracted the attention of several researchers (in addition to Haig, also, e.g., Bashir, Bynon, Farrell, Korn, Matras, and Payne, see pp. 339–358, References). The present work by Haig can be seen as an attempt to systematize and summarize the principles governing TSA in Iranian languages. In his introduction, Haig poses a main question that he aims to address, namely "why ... the alignment associated with past transitive clauses came adrift from the rest of the grammar" (p. 1). His second major aim is "to investigate the array of non-accusative alignments found in past transitive constructions" in several Iranian languages (p. 1).

In chapter 2, Haig discusses the historical origin of TSA and suggests a possible re-interpretation of the Old Persian prototypical ergative construction *manā kartam*, which has often been referred to as an agented passive (by me, done). Haig prefers to call this construction an "external possessor construction (EPC)" (see, e.g., p. 61) (to me, done). In chapter 5, he returns to the EPC and other constructions with non-canonical subjects found in the Kurdish dialect Badīnānī (pp. 256–263) to further support his argument for a close link between a non-canonical subject construction and the ergative construction.

Chapter 3 is devoted to Western Middle Iranian, particularly to the reduction of the case system; the loss of finite past tense verb forms, which left only the past participle as a past verb forms; and the role of the pronominal clitics to express, e.g., the possessor, the indirect participant, and the agent of past transitive verbs. Haig demonstrates that the pronominal clitics often allow for different interpretations (see, e.g., pp. 108–111), which again links indirect participant constructions to the ergative construction.

In chapter 4, case systems in New West Iranian languages are described and their impact on TSA is analyzed. Various patterns of alignment on the "ergative continuum" are demonstrated, from fully ergative to fully accusative. The tendency towards a cross-system harmony is described as more often leading to double oblique, where both the object[1] (O) and the subject[2] (A) of a transitive verb are marked, than to neutral marking (neither O nor A is marked).

In the subsequent chapters (ch. 5 and 6), Haig provides useful empirical descriptions of TSA in various Kurdish dialects based on his own and others' research on this language.

There are three indexes at the end, a subject index, an index of Iranian languages, and an index of non-Iranian languages. The list of references also contains indications of the pages where a certain work is cited, which is very convenient.

A recurring theme throughout the work, which is also an important part of the answer Haig proposes to his initial question, namely why the alignment in past transitive clauses is different from that of non-past and past intransitive clauses, is the idea of non-canonical subjects for external possessor (*mihi est*) and possibly for other less agentive subjects (e.g., to express desire, obligation, necessity). This is, of course, only part of the answer, since non-canonical subjects are not limited to the past temporal field. However, with the loss of the finite past-tense verb forms, the re-interpretation of an external possessor as the agent was clearly possible without case marking the O (e.g. *manā hamaranam kartam*: to me, battle, fought [or: my, battle, fought] > by me, battle, fought).

This work of Haig's is of great importance in Iranian linguistics. It gives a broad picture of alignment in Iranian languages and of historical processes and principles at work in the shaping of different alignment patterns found in New Iranian languages. In addition, it gives a profound picture of the situation in a number of Kurdish variants, from (mainly) ergative alignment for transitive verbs in the past temporal field (e.g., several Northern Kurdish dialects, where, however, Haig finds interesting deviations from a canonical ergative alignment), to accusative alignment (Gilan Kurdish, a displaced variant of Northern Kurdish in close contact with, e.g., Persian which has full accusative alignment). It is interesting to note that a similar range of diverging alignment patterns can be found in, e.g., Balochi, where several Southern and Eastern dialects have more or less canonical TSA, and some Western dialects, among others the displaced Turkmenistan Balochi, have accusative alignment, something which Haig also notes (p. 319). I was very happy to learn that Haig has included material from two studies conducted at Uppsala University, namely an M.A. thesis on Gilan Kurdish by Behrooz Shojai and a Ph.D. thesis on Turkmenistan Balochi by Serge Axenov.

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[1] In linguistic literature also often called patient (P).

[2] In linguistic literature also often called agent, thus the abbreviation (A).

A discussion that I find particularly useful and clarifying in this work is that of syntactic subjecthood (as opposed to morphologically defined subjecthood). Haig outlines criteria applicable to Iranian languages in general, and Kurdish in particular, which are common to the A and the subject of an intransitive verb (S) and distinguish them from O, even in cases where S and O have the same case marking (i.e. in clauses with a transitive verb in the past temporal field if the language/dialect has TSA). The clearest of these criteria for syntactic subjecthood is, according to Haig (pp. 218–222) control of reflexives. This criterion can also be applied to non-canonical subjects (e.g. dative or genitive subjects) in order to establish their syntactic subject status.

If I were to make some minor critical comments on this excellent study, I might bring up the point that I occasionally find the treatment of personal clitics inconsistent. They are referred to as clitics, and are mostly separated with the symbol "=", which is the normal practice for a clitic (see, e.g., pp. 279–300, exs 295, 296, 304–310, 312, 313, 315–322, 326–334, 338–341, 343–345 (in 345, the gloss 1S:CLC would seem more correct), but sometimes with the symbol "-", which is the normal practice for a suffix, not a clitic (see, e.g., p. 289, exs 323–325), and sometimes in an inconsistent way (see, e.g., p. 284, ex. 311, p. 298, ex. 342; maybe these two instances should just be regarded as typos). In ex 335 (p. 294) the interpretation 1S:CLC for *-m-* seems more logical than 1S, and in ex. 337 (p. 295) it also seems that the morpheme *-it-* is a pronominal clitic.

The indexes would also have needed a bit more attention. In the index of Iranian languages several occurrences have been missed, such as Old Persian on p. 133 and Chali on pp. 149, 154, 155, 159. The same variant is listed in different ways (place name and language name) for two entries (Shāhrud/Shāhrudi, Ṭārom/Ṭāromi) and, e.g., Dimili (see, e.g., p. 202) is left out (maybe since it is regarded as a synonym of Zazaki). In the index of non-Iranian languages, three of the languages mentioned on p. 229 are also overlooked (Chamorro, Hebrew, Yimas).

These points, as well as minor typos, do not in any way diminish the importance of this study of alignment in Iranian languages, which has a strong synchronic grounding, both in the comprehensive description of various Kurdish variants and in the broad treatment of tendencies and constraints in a large number of other New Iranian languages. The study also has a unique diachronic dimension, which spans over approximately 2500 years and outlines important features of alignment change in Iranian languages. Geoffrey Haig demonstrates a profound knowledge of both historical and synchronic Iranian linguistics.

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North East Indian Linguistics, Volume 2. B65. Edited by Stephen Morey and Mark Post. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press India, xii +256 pp., 2010. ISBN 978-81-7596-714-4.

North East Indian Linguistics, Volume 2 is a collection of 14 articles from two annual International Conferences of the North East Indian Linguistics Society (NEILS). Most of the articles were presented at the Second NEILS conference held 5–9 February 2007 in Guwahati, Assam, but some were presented at the Third NEILS conference, held at the same venue 18–22 January 2008.

The volume is a welcome addition. It displays rich diversity on many levels including wide representation of the languages of this region and of both Indian and international researchers. Similarly, the authors include more established senior researchers as well as students, and more importantly, both native and non-native speakers. The topics range from a field report to five articles on tonology and phonology in the Assam floodplain, a special section (three articles) on numerals, and a section on morphology and syntax from Tani to Kuki-Chin (five articles). Most articles include fieldwork-based data in their analyses.

The volume opens with a "Foreword" by Robbins Burling, followed by "A note from the editors". In the foreword, Robbins Burling, one of the most active and productive scholars in the North East Indian region, reminisces about the history of the area and his own experiences, and the changes that the area has gone through over the 54 years since he first arrived in North East India in 1954. He admits to feeling a bit of initial discomfort about the place being crowded by fellow researchers, but also grateful to all the new colleagues who share his interest in the languages of this region, and especially the native speakers who are now being trained and their contribution to the research on the languages of this region.

The field report entitled "Preliminary Notes on Dakpa (Tawang Monpa)" (pp. 3–21) is written by Gwendolyn Hyslop (University of Oregon) and Karma Tshering (Himalayan Languages Project). The data was collected in 2007. Although it is a preliminary report, it provides a sketch of the phonology and morphology of this otherwise undocumented language. The data is presented in light of other genetically related East Bodish languages. The field report focuses its attention on areas where Dakpa seems to differ from the other languages of this subgroup. Some important differences include complex consonant clusters, even in codas; the presence of voiceless vowels; and a more complex verbal morphology, including a vowel alternation in some stems and evidential marking.

The section on the tonology and phonology in the Assam floodplain starts with the article "An acoustic study of Dimasa tones," by Priyankoo Sarmah (University of Florida) and Caroline Wiltshire (University of Florida) (pp. 25–44). They have examined the tones of Dimasa using an instrumental acoustic analysis method, and conducted a series of production tests based on the speech of three native speakers. The results suggest that Dimasa has three tones. Each word has only one lexical tone, making Dimasa a tonal language with a word-level tone assignment, unlike, for instance, Thai and Chinese, which display a syllable-level tone assignment. The article describes how tones operate in different environments in Dimasa. It also demonstrates the effect of different consonants on the pitch of the following vowel. It shows that the effect of consonants on the following vowel extends into 20 percent of the pitch contour of the vowel, and that the amount of perturbation into the F0 differs according to consonant type. The authors argue in favor of measuring the consonantal effect in percentages instead of time units, and express the hope that this methodology will be used to measure tonal inventories in other languages, too.

The next article in this section is entitled "Boro tones," by Robbins Burling (University of Michigan) and U. V. Joseph (Don Bosco, Umswai, Assam) (pp. 45–58). There has been some disagreement concerning the number and nature of tones in the language, as the tones, especially in polysyllabic words, are complicated and difficult to analyze. According to the analysis presented in this article, monosyllabic words in Boro can have one of two tones, high or low.

Disyllable words can have one of three tones: a low level tone, a high rising tone (which the authors take to be the same underlying tones as in monosyllabic words) or a low falling tone. According to this analysis, Boro is also a tonal language which assigns tone to words, and not syllables. According to the authors, this analysis is not unproblematic, but it is the most satisfying analysis the authors have been able to come up with so far. For future research the authors suggest an investigation as to how and to what extent the tones of compounds are determined by the tone of the individual roots, and how tones interact with intonation and with each other.

An article on “The realization of tones in traditional Tai Phake songs,” by Stephen Morey (La Trobe University), follows (pp. 59–74). In this article the author investigates how the tone and pitch of the language interact with the melody of the song in Tai Phake traditional songs. Phake has six tones, which vary in length as well as pitch (two falling and one rising) and manner (glottal constriction/creakiness). Tai Phake exhibits various singing styles. The article examines two such traditional styles. The study shows that in these two traditional singing styles, the tones are expressed within the constraints of the melody, with a contour for contour tones and a level pitch for the level tone. A length contrast is also realized when the citation tone is long. The author also found that the creaky tone was realized as a low level tone in one of the songs.

“Linguistic features of the Ahom Bar Amra” is the topic of the next article in this section (pp. 75–94). The authors are Zeenat Tabassum (Gauhati University) and Stephen Morey (La Trobe University). Ahom Bar Amra is the name of the 18th century Ahom-Assamese lexicon, written in the Ahom script. Ahom is an ancient language which is no longer in use as a mother tongue, but that survives in rituals and in old manuscripts. It was used in the Ahom kingdom, which lasted from 1228 to 1824. The authors demonstrate inaccuracies in Ahom-Assamese dictionaries which were published in the 20th century, especially when it comes to initial consonant clusters. The initial consonant clusters found in the older Ahom manuscripts do not correspond to the ones found in these modern Ahom dictionaries. The authors suggest that the writing of initial clusters in the newer dictionaries may represent the pronunciation of modern Ahom priests, and may or may not reflect the original pronunciation. It could also be a hyper-correction by priests who knew that initial clusters were present in the spoken language, but were not certain which they were and where they occurred. This is supported by the fact that some words are written with initial clusters in one manuscript and with single consonants in other manuscripts. The authors call for a more thorough investigation of the original manuscripts. They also suggest that the reconstruction of proto-Southwestern Tai forms based on these dictionaries accordingly be revised.

The last article in this section is called “Some aspects of the phonology of the Barpetia Dialect of Assamese” (pp. 95–114), written by Mukul Kumar Sarma (Bapujee College). The author examines the Barpetia dialect, a sub-dialect of the Kamrupia dialect of Assamese. Barpetia is a conservative dialect, as it preserves many of the features of older Kamrupi. The origin of the Assamese language is said to pre-date Sanskrit and Vedic literature, and this is especially clear in this dialect, according to the author. Many words are pre-Vedic and bear no resemblance to Sanskrit roots. In the article, the author presents some phonological processes of the Barpetia dialect, without postulating a theory of the historical development of the features. The processes included here are consonant hardening and alternation of consonants (the voicing of final stops in compounds), which are more frequent than vowel alternations in this dialect. Weak vowel harmony is found in some cases in Barpetia, in addition to umlaut. The article also describes the word-initial stress pattern, which distinguishes Barpetia from the other (standard) Assamese variants.

The next section is on numerals. It contains three articles: “Number-building in Tibeto-Burman languages” (Martine Mazaudon), “The Numeral ‘One’ in Khasi and Karbi” (U.V Joseph), and “A comparative study of Kom and Aimol numerals” (Chongom Damrengthang Aimol).

Martine Mazaudon (Lacito-CNRS) writes on “Number-building in Tibeto-Burman languages” (pp. 117–148). The majority of the Tibeto-Burman languages have the decimal number system, where 10 is used as the base. There are, however, some languages which exhibit rather uncommon bases, such as 20, 12, 5, and even 4. A very complex unique system is the Dzonkha vigesimal (base 20) system, which can compute all numbers up to 160,000 (20^4), and is one of the most complex number systems known in the world. Other rather uncommon systems include some older structures which were thought to have disappeared, such as fractional counting in Lepcha and the quinary-vigesimal system which still survives among older Hayu speakers. The author points out that number systems are often poorly reported and might not be discovered in regular linguistic fieldwork. The author warns that many of the number systems are rapidly disappearing.

U.V Joseph (Don Bosco) has investigated "The numeral 'one' in Khasi and Karbi," which belongs to two different language families (Mon-Khmer and Tibeto-Burman, respectively). However, as they are spoken in partly overlapping geographical regions, there seem to have been some lexical borrowing from Khasi to Karbi in particular. This is reflected in the different uses of the numeral 'one' in classifier constructions in the two languages. The author hypothesizes that the Karbi *i-nut* 'one person' has its origin in Khasi **shi-ngut*, which is the numeral 'one' attached to the human classifier. The order of the two units, NUM-CL, is the normal order in Khasi, but not in Karbi. This form is not in use in Karbi anymore, but is preserved as a borrowed unit in Karbi. The author suggests that the classifier constructions in Karbi, where the bound form *i-* or *e-* of the numeral 'one' appears, are also of Khasi origin.

The final article in the section on numerals is "A comparative study of Kom and Aimol numerals" by Chongom Damrengthang Aimol (Manipur University) (pp. 162–172). The author is a native speaker of Aimol. Kom and Aimol belong to the Kuki-Chin-Naga subgroup within the Tibeto-Burman family. They are mutually intelligible. The number of speakers of Kom is much greater than of Aimol. The author exemplifies how ordinal numbers; multiplicative, aggregative, and approximate numerals; fractional numbers; indefinite quantity; and distributive and restrictive numerals are formed. The constructions and semantics are the same in both languages, although the forms themselves occasionally are different. The author notes that the Kom suffix for restrictive numerals is unrelated to the distributive form, whereas the Aimol form seems to be related to it. Both languages have a decimal system.

The theme of the last section is "Morphology and Syntax from Tani to Kuki-Chin". It consists of five articles. The first article concerns predicate derivations in the Tani languages, and was written by Mark Post (La Trobe University) (pp. 175–197). The article provides a description of the structural and functional properties of Tani predicate derivations, and raises some theoretical questions in this regard. The author also gives a possible diachronic account of the origin of the Tani predicate derivations. The main goal of the article is to examine if the predicate derivations in Tani are best analyzed as roots or suffixes, or perhaps neither of the two. The results suggest that the predicate derivations in Tani are semantically complex and highly productive stem-expanding formatives. Their morphological status is, however, still unclear. There are arguments in favor of calling them lexical roots as well as for treating them as suffixes. They seem to be historically derived from an earlier system of serial verb constructions.

Madhumita Barbora's (Tezpur University) article focuses on "The non-finite markers *-la* and *-pc*[1] in Mising" (pp. 198–218), though it also provides an overview of other non-finite markers. Both the non-finite markers have a range of functions. They are both used to form participles, as well as occurring in purpose clauses (*-pc*) and relative clauses (*-la*). In addition, *-pc* functions as an adverbializer, and as a dative case marker. It also has a modal meaning. Similarly, *-la*, functions as a nominalizer and as a modal particle.

The next article in this section concerns "Universal quantifiers in Manipuri" (pp. 219–230). It was written by Chandam Betholia (Manipur University), who is a native speaker of Manipuri. Universal quantifiers are expressions with meanings resembling those of English *every,*

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[1] In Mising orthography the <c >represents the schwa phoneme /ə/.

each, and *all*.[2] The term stems from predicate logic, but is also used for quantifiers in natural languages. There are three universal quantifiers in Manipuri; *pumnəmək* ‘all’, *loynəmək* ‘all/every’, and *khudiŋmək* ‘each’. The author compares these, finding that the first two allow for a collective interpretation, but *loynəmək* also allows for a distributive interpretation. *Pumnəmək* cannot quantify uncountable objects, whereas *loynəmək* can. *Khudiŋmək* only allows for a distributive interpretation, even with a collective adverbial. All three quantifiers can be used with negation, but not with numerals in the same sentence. The author also discusses the semantic interpretation of the morpheme *–mək*, which is suffixed to these three quantifiers. It is sometimes interpreted as meaning ‘only’, but the alternative interpretation as an emphatic marker is more plausible.

“Negation in Chote grammar” is the topic of the next article (pp. 231–240), written by Brojen Hidam Sing, (Education Directorate, Imphal, Manipur), who is also a native speaker of the language. A comprehensive study of different negative constructions is provided here, including a description of ‘double negation’, which often results in a positive statement, and can sometimes express inevitability.

The last article of this section and of the book is on the “Benefactives in K’cho” (pp. 241–256), and is written by George Bedell (Payap University), and Kee Shein Mang, (Payap University), the latter a native speaker of the language. They investigate the benefactive suffix *-pe*, which is related to the verb *pe* ‘give’, and interacts with an adverbial particle *tu*, ‘together’. The combination *-tu-pe* has a comitative interpretation, with the presence of *-tu* implying that the beneficiary is an active participant in the situation. The suffix *-pe*, by itself, may have either a benefactive or malfactive interpretation. The article also provides a formal syntactic analysis of the benefactive construction.

To conclude, this volume of North East Indian Linguistics is a welcome addition to the literature available on the languages of this region. As most of the articles included in this volume are based on the authors’ own fieldwork, the volume provides unique insights and new information on languages which are otherwise severely underdescribed. The collection reflects the diversity of both the researchers working in the area, and the different languages and varieties spoken there. Anyone interested in learning more about these languages, and about the topics covered in the book, will benefit from this collection of articles.

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[2] Gil, David. 2011. Conjunctions and Universal Quantifiers. In: Dryer, Matthew S. & Haspelmath, Martin (eds.) The World Atlas of Language Structures Online. Munich: Max Planck Digital Library, chapter 56. Available online at http://wals.info/chapter/56 . Accessed on 2012-01-07.

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