

## CHAPTER TWO: QISSA AND MASS PRINTING

This study will be chiefly concerned with the form of qissa current today: qissa as a genre of printed popular literature in Hindi and Urdu. The word “popular,” however, has two senses. Some works of popular (“of the people”) literature are more popular (“favored, preferred”) than others. In this study, “popular” will be used in the second sense only, to compare readers’ preference, as measured by sales, for one work over others. “Popular” in the first sense will be replaced by “mass” or “folk” as appropriate.

The Indian mass publishing industry, today as in the past, produces ephemeral texts which are cheaply printed, cheaply bound, and cheaply sold. Covers are vividly decorated, often with inappropriate pictures that serve for many different texts. Other illustrations, if any, are crude line drawings; these are more common in handwritten, lithographed Urdu qissas than in typeset Hindi ones. Texts are controlled only by the publisher. They are often anonymous, often ascribed to an “author” who may be a plagiarizer, translator, compiler, or editor. Printings are small and reprintings frequent. Anything that sells is reprinted and imitated; anything that fails to sell drops out of sight without a trace. Qissa as a modern printed genre is part of this fluid, flexible, constantly evolving world of mass publishing. It cannot be fully understood without relating its history to the development of mass publishing in North India.

The earliest printing presses in India were controlled by foreigners, and were used to publish Christian religious works, language texts, dictionaries, and schoolbooks.<sup>1</sup> The first handful of Indian-owned presses published newspapers, indigenous religious works, didactic literature, and translations of classic texts from Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian. These early printed works were relatively rare and expensive; they were produced by and for the educated urban elite, and in fact were often directly subsidized by wealthy patrons. Only gradually did presses come into the hands of ordinary businessmen--men who promoted no creed, received no subsidies, and had no sense of mission, but wanted only to print books that would sell. Only at this comparatively late stage in Indian publishing history did mass printing come into existence.

The history of qissa publishing offers a case in point. For the first and most obvious landmark in qissa publishing, as in so many other areas, is Fort William College in Calcutta. Established in 1800 as a language training center for British colonial administrators, Fort William is usually taken to mark the beginning of modern Hindi and Urdu prose.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars dispute this view.<sup>3</sup> But there can be no doubt that Fort William was the earliest and most influential source of printed Urdu and Hindi qissa texts. Fort William’s series of commissioned publications included qissas, fairy tales, and didactic fables of all kinds, drawn from many different sources. These traditional tales, intended as readers for language students, were naturally restricted to a simple style--a style which at its best was lively, clear, and

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<sup>1</sup>Katharine Smith Diehl, “The Role of Government and Introduction of Type Printing to South Asia,” in K. S. Diehl, ed., **Primary Printed and Manuscript Sources for Sixteenth to Nineteenth Century Studies Available in Bengal Orissa and Bihar Libraries** (Calcutta: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1971), pp. 221-231.

<sup>2</sup>Suniti Kumar Chatterji, **Languages and Literatures of Modern India** (Calcutta: Bengal Publishers, 1963), pp. 131, 148.

<sup>3</sup>For example, see Muhammad Sadiq, **A History of Urdu Literature** (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 212; and similarly Aziz Ahmad, **Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment** (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 255.

unpretentious, and at its worst was flat, monotonous, and childish. Fort William publications included a number of qissa texts which were later picked up by the mass printing industry: works like **Baitāl pachchīsī** (1802), **Qiṣṣah-e chahār darvesh** (1801), **Gul-e bakāvalī** (1803), **Qiṣṣah-e Ḥātīm Tāf** (1803), and **Siṅhāsan battīsī** (1801).

After being called into existence by British fiat, for a long period these qissa texts excited no special interest, and remained white elephants of a sort. As far as can be judged from existing records, most of them were scarcely printed at all in the Urdu/Hindi-speaking area during the first half of the nineteenth century. In his famous history of Lucknow, Abdul Ḥalīm Sharar gives an acid account of the reception accorded to Mīr Amman's **Qiṣṣah-e chahār darvesh**, the most beautifully written Fort William text:

Although the skill of Mīr Amman as a writer may have come to the notice of the British in those days, it had not been recognized by any Urdu-speaking person. This was so because the effects of British education had not yet changed the country's literary style and oriental taste in literature....Therefore to think that when *Chahar Darvesh* was written, except for its popularity with the British, who did not even understand Urdu, it was accorded any literary merit by learned men of India, is completely unrealistic.<sup>4</sup>

Sharar's disdain for Mīr Amman Dihlavī (of Delhi) is no doubt partly a function of the Delhi-Lucknow rivalry so prominent in the history of Urdu criticism.<sup>5</sup> But his emphasis on the taste of the educated is a point well taken. For the educated elite were definitely in control of the few available printing presses during the first half of the nineteenth century.

An official British study published in 1855 gives an excellent picture of the North Indian publishing scene at mid-century. In 1848, there were only seventeen Indian-owned presses in the whole area: three devoted to Persian, eleven to Urdu, three to Hindi.<sup>6</sup> (However interwoven they may be in colloquial speech, Urdu and Hindi as languages of printing are clearly differentiated by their separate scripts.<sup>7</sup>)

By 1849, there were twenty-three presses, which in that year published (along with newspapers) a total of 101 books. The nature of these books was noted with little enthusiasm in the official study.

With the exception of about forty books in Hindee, Sanscrit, and Mahrattē, printed at the Indore and Benares Presses, the majority of which contain little, besides forms of prayer for the Hindoo population of those towns, these books are all in the Arabic, Persian, and Oordoo languages, and consist chiefly of reprints, and translations into Oordoo of Persian and Arabic works, among which treatises on medicine and editions of the Quoran appear to command the readiest sale.

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<sup>4</sup>Abdul Ḥalīm Sharar, **Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture**, trans. and ed. by E. S. Harcourt and Fakhir Husain (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1975), p. 89. See also Russell's comments on the printing history of **Chahār darvesh**, "The Development of the Modern Novel in Urdu," p. 105.

<sup>5</sup>For a historical examination of this rivalry see Carla Petievich, **Assembly of Rivals: Delhi, Lucknow, and the Urdu Ghazal** (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1992).

<sup>6</sup>Government of the North Western Provinces, "On the Native Press in the North Western Provinces," **Selections from the Records of Government**, North West Provinces (Agra, 1855), 3:237.

<sup>7</sup>For an intelligent general discussion of the Hindi-Urdu language situation, see Paul R. Brass, **Language, Religion, and Politics in North India** (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 128-136.

Of these 101 books, twenty-seven were described as “Works on Poetry, and General Literature”; 5,045 copies of them were printed, and valued at Rs. 5,530. Thus an average of merely 187 copies of each book were printed, and these sold for an average price of a little over a rupee per book--a much larger sum than now. Moreover, subsidies were common; in one case as many as five out of a press’s six books were subsidized by a patron.<sup>8</sup>

The handful of qissas printed during this period were not yet designed for a mass market. They were expensive and slow-moving, printed in small quantities and sold in even smaller ones. A few examples:

**Baitāl pachchīsī** (Delhi: Maṭba, ul-,Ulūm, 1852, Urdu): 300 copies printed at Rs. 1 each, of which 10 were sold in the first year.

**Chahār darvesh** (Agra: Maṭba, Jām-e Jamshīd, 1850, Urdu): 275 copies printed at Rs. 1, 4 annas, each, of which 25 were sold in the first year.

**Gul-e bakāvalī** (Kanpur: Maṭba, Muṣṭafāḥ, 1852, Urdu): 500 copies printed at Rs. 1 each, of which 200 were sold in the first year.

**Hātim Ṭāḥ** (Banaras: Banāras Aḳhbār Press, 1851, Hindi): 201 copies printed at Rs. 2, 8 annas, each, of which 28 were sold in the first year.

**Siñhāsan battīsī** (Indore: Mālvā Aḳhbār, 1849, Hindi): 240 copies printed at Rs. 1 each, of which 78 were sold in the first year.

Things were, however, beginning to change. The study commented on the innovative business methods of the successful Kanpur press Maṭba, Muṣṭafāḥ, the proprietor of which not only produced (relatively) inexpensive books but also promoted them, sending out “agents with his books for sale to the principal cities.”<sup>9</sup>

During the 1860s eleven new Urdu presses were established, and during the 1870s, ten.<sup>10</sup> Hindi presses also grew much more numerous. By the 1880s mass publishing in both Urdu and Hindi had definitely begun. Literate readers and story-tellers served a large illiterate public, and literacy was growing slowly but steadily among ordinary people. The various catalogues of the India Office Library and the British Museum Library, compiled by J. F. Blumhardt, gives perhaps the best idea of the wide range of Urdu and Hindi publishing activity during the later nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> By the turn of the century Hindi, which was now being energetically promoted by the Nāgarī Prachārīnī Sabhā and its sympathizers,<sup>12</sup> was beginning to rival Urdu--which, with its earlier development, sophistication, prestige, and value as a link language, had been till then the language of choice for North Indian publishing.

So many presses were established during this period that it became impossible to keep close track of them all. Through Act XXV of 1867 and Act X of 1890, the Government of India required publishers to submit detailed information about their publications, together with copies of all works printed. The information submitted under these acts was compiled and

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<sup>8</sup>Government of the North Western Provinces, “On the Native Press,” pp. 247, 251-252.

<sup>9</sup>Government of the North Western Provinces, “On the Native Press,” pp. 261, 267, 286, 300, 303. Transliteration has been modernized.

<sup>10</sup>Muḥammad Yāmīn Parvez, “Urdū chhāpeḳhāne,” *Ājkal* 31,5 (December 1972):37-43; 31,8 (March 1973):41-43.

<sup>11</sup>These catalogues are listed in the Bibliography. See also George A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, 11 vols. (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1903-1922; reprint ed., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968), vol. 9, pt. 1, pp. 30-40; and Parvez, “Urdū chhāpeḳhāne.”

<sup>12</sup>Christopher King, in *The Nagari Pracharini Sabha*, provides a fascinating discussion of this process.

published at quarterly intervals in each state of British India, from the 1890s until Independence. These publication records have been reproduced by the South Asia Microform Project (S.A.M.P.). Often extensively annotated, these records are an invaluable resource for literary and historical study in many Indian languages. Records from the S.A.M.P. collection which were used for the present study are described and discussed in Appendix A. Almost all the quantitative data and historical perspectives presented in this study rest upon these publication records from the S.A.M.P. collection.

Post-Independence records do not include mass printed literature, despite--or perhaps because of--the vast quantities in which it is currently produced. The Indian National Bibliography deliberately excludes "ephemeral material" from its coverage. And an authoritative recent study of the Indian publishing industry recognizes that there exist "a number of publishers who bring out short booklets or pamphlets on folklore.... These booklets are printed in large number and priced very low.... Information on the extent of such publishing is not available."<sup>13</sup> My information about post-Independence qissa publishing therefore rests chiefly upon my own research in India during 1977-1978: upon contacts with publishers, visits to bookstores, acquisition and study of the widest possible range of texts.

Naturally enough, publishers aiming at the late-nineteenth-century North Indian mass market relied primarily on works which had already established themselves: those derived from classical (often Sanskrit) sources, or widely popular in oral form. Works on magic, astrology, and medicine; songs, poetry, and folk-operas; religious stories and texts from epic, Puranic, and other sources--these were the staples of the trade. Works of these kinds continue to be staples of the trade today--including many of the same individual works which were popular a century ago. This kind of folk literature is only beginning to receive the attention it deserves.<sup>14</sup>

The Urdu qissa/dastan tradition was strong in late-nineteenth-century North India, as we have seen. A number of the Fort William Urdu texts were qissas of the classic sort: quest stories full of marvelous adventures undertaken by noble heroes. Their simple prose style made them natural candidates for mass publication, and naturally "qissa" was the generic term used to describe them. Two other Fort William texts, **Siñhāsan battīsī** (published in both Hindi and Urdu) and **Baitāl pachchīsī** (published in Hindi), recounted the adventures of Raja Vikram, who had been a hero of Indian folk tradition for centuries. Not surprisingly, these texts too were picked up by the mass publishing industry. Vikram's adventures, as we will see, fitted excellently into the classic qissa pattern; by a natural process of assimilation, they came to be considered qissas. Since Hindi prose scarcely existed before Fort William, there were no other readily available generic categories into which such works might fall.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, as mass publishing continued to develop, more and more works were picked up by publishers for the mass market. Some of these were by common consent described as qissas: because they used the word qissa in their titles, because they resembled traditional qissas in one way or another, because there was no other convenient place in publishers' catalogues--or minds--to put them. Many of them went out of print so quickly that today they can be known only as names on lists of publications. Others had much longer careers, achieving considerable popularity and remaining in print until well into the

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<sup>13</sup>National Council of Applied Economic Research, **Survey of Indian Book Industry**, 2 vols. (New Delhi: National Council of Applied Economic Research, 1976), 1:13-14.

<sup>14</sup>Susan S. Wadley, "Collecting Popular Traditions," **South Asia Library Notes and Queries** 1 (September 1978):4-6.

twentieth century--works like **Chamelī Gulāb**, **Champā Chamelī**, **Nau ratan**, **Qiṣṣah-e saudāgar bachchah**, **Qiṣṣah-e shāh-e Rūm**, **Qiṣṣah-e sipāhīzādah**, **Ṭūṭī nāmah**. But today all these works are out of print; within the scope of the present study it is not possible to do more than mention them briefly.

Some late-nineteenth-century works, however, achieved an enormous and lasting popularity, which they have retained to the present. Together with some of the Fort William works, they have come to constitute the hardy perennials of the qissa genre. This group includes **Baitāl pachchīsī**, **Qiṣṣah-e chahār darvesh**, **Chhabīlī bhaṭiyārī**, **Kissā aurat Ḍallā**, **Fasānah-e ʾajāfb**, **Gul-e bakāvalī**, **Gul o Ṣanobar**, **Qiṣṣah-e Ḥātim Ṭāf**, **Keshar Gulāb**, **Lailā Majnūn**, **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij**, **Sārhe tīn yār**,<sup>15</sup> **Sīnhāsan battīsī**, **Qissā totā mainā**, **Triyā charitra**. For convenience, members of this group will be called “perennials” in this study. All are printed today [1978] in the thousands, from Delhi to Calcutta; most are popular in both Hindi and Urdu versions. The twentieth century has produced as new candidates for the group **Shīt Basaṅt** and **Gaṅgārām paṭel Bulākhī Dās nāi**, both apparently now growing in popularity.

By firmly appropriating and constantly reprinting works like the above, qissa has become a well-established printed genre in both Urdu and Hindi. As a genre it can be seen to have a “core” and an “outer layer”-- or perhaps, like the **ṭilism-e hošrubā**, an Inner Enchantment and an Outer Enchantment. The historical “core” of the genre consists of works in the main line of descent from Persian qissas, stories in which a noble hero has many marvelous adventures and finally achieves the goal of his quest. Works of this kind include **Baitāl pachchīsī**, **Qiṣṣah-e chahār darvesh**, **Fasānah-e ʾajāfb**, **Gul-e bakāvalī**, **Gul o Ṣanobar**, **Qiṣṣah-e Ḥātim Ṭāf**, **Keshar Gulāb**, **Sīnhāsan battīsī**, **Shīt Basaṅt**.

The “outer layer” of the genre consists of works in which sexual encounters replace marvelous adventures as the main source of narrative interest. Such works existed in Persian as well, but were always tangential to the main line of generic development: **Lailā Majnūn**, **Shīrīn Farhād**, **Ṭūṭī nāmah** were never typical of Persian qissa literature. In Hindi and Urdu, such works have been fully accepted as belonging to the qissa genre, and have become a major part of it both qualitative and quantitatively. They are “outer” not at all in the sense of being unrepresentative or insignificant, but only in the sense of being newer accretions around the central core. Works of this sort include a few stories of love transcendent and love triumphant (**Lailā Majnūn**, **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij**), and far more numerous stories of love deceived and sex exploited (**Chhabīlī bhaṭiyārī**, **Kissā aurat Ḍallā**, **Gaṅgārām paṭel Bulākhī Dās nāi**, **Sārhe tīn yār**, **Shuk bahattarī**, **Qissā totā mainā**, **Triyā charitra**).

These “outer layer” stories all take place in either an overtly marvelous universe--full of talking animals, strange beings, magic powers, etc.--or a covertly marvelous one, in which the most improbable masquerades (such as women passing for men) and implausible ruses are invariably successful. Formal **ṭilisms** however are absent, and the marvelous elements appear “natural.” Not noble and virtuous men, but clever and untrustworthy women, are at the center of many of these stories. Plots develop more ambiguously: “evil” characters of both sexes may be attractive, ingenious, energetic rogues, and may prosper; virtuous characters may be naive, passive sufferers, and may even die. Endings may be entertaining to the reader, rather than happy for the characters. Examples of “**triyā charitra**” (literally, “women’s character,” but in practice, “women’s wiles”) and the escapades of clever, treacherous women provide most of the narrative interest; male deceivers and tricksters usually appear as accomplices or foils. We will

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<sup>15</sup>I believe this work to be nineteenth-century, though the earliest dated copy I have discovered is from 1910.

look at one such story of sexual conflict in Chapter Five, and at one of the rare love stories in Chapter Six.

All these perennials, with their immense popularity, have always given rise to imitations, and have inspired countless new works in the genre. At least a couple of hundred individual qissas, all competing desperately for survival, are in print today. Virtually all are in prose; most are printed by only one or two publishers. The law of the jungle ensures that most of them will sooner or later (and probably in fact rather sooner than later) go under, and others take their place. A few of these newly written qissas deal with passionate love or with sexual trickery. But the great majority are quest stories with noble heroes and marvelous adventures, and thus are close to the “core” of the qissa genre.

Such modern qissas are often quite aware of the Urdu dastan tradition; sometimes they explicitly invoke it. They may advertise themselves as “a thrilling, original dastan filled with fearful events,” or “an original dastan of the **tilasmī** world”; a qissa writer may even be described as a “famous and well-known **dāstān go** of North India.”<sup>16</sup> They set great store by their **ṭilisms**, as can be seen from titles like **Koh-e Qāf kā jādūgar** (The Magician of Mount Qaf), **Tin tilasm** (Three Tilisms), **Sunharī tilism** (The Golden Tilism), and **Sar zindā dhar murdā, ajībo garīb tilasm** (The Head Alive and the Body Dead, a Strange and Wonderful Tilism).<sup>17</sup> The single most common title for modern qissas is of the form “**Tilasmī** -----,” and the second most common is of the form “**Jādūī** -----,” with both meaning “The Magic -----.” The blank may be filled in with any typical fairy-tale image--carpet, flower, horse, lake, mirror, ring, sword, etc.--at the writer’s pleasure; numerous examples will be found in the Qissa Bibliography.

Yet cultural changes are evident as well. In many Hindi qissas, some of the stock characters of Islamic story tradition are replaced by their Hindu counterparts: the prince (**shahzādā**--or **rāj Kumār**) is aided in his encounters with demons (Dev--or Rakshas, Dānav, Daitya, etc.) by an ascetic (**pīr**, **faqīr**--or **yogī**, **sādhu**, **mahātmā**) or a fairy (Parī--or Apsarā). And he may be given a mantra instead of a Name of God to say; Shiv and Pārvatī, instead of K̄hizr, may appear at critical moments; the dead may be revived with **amṛt** instead of **āb-e ḥayāt**. But these changes are small ones; they are all the more permissible since, in classic qissa fashion, the stories take place in exotic and unknown places. Modern qissas are set in legendary cities like Siñhaldvīp, imaginary cities like “Anjangaṛh,” the Baghdad of Hārūn ur-Rashīd--or even Rome, where the hero Robert (Rābart) lives.<sup>18</sup>

And some Urdu and Hindi words are replaced, or supplemented, by English words. English words which have become common in Hindi and Urdu are freely used: minute, mile,

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<sup>16</sup>**Kissā Lālparī**, by Kailāshnāth Gupta (Varanasi: Ṭhākurprasād and Sons, 24 p., Hindi); **Hīre kī khetī**, by Shrī Nishikar (Calcutta: Shrī Loknāth Pustakālay, 24 p., Hindi); **Qiṣṣah zamāne kī havā**, by Shiv Nāth Rāḥ Taskīn (Delhi: Agarvāl Book Depot, 1954, 24 p., Urdu).

<sup>17</sup>**Qiṣṣah Koh-e Qāf kā jādūgar**, by Zāhūr ul-Ḥasan Shiddīqī Maikash (Delhi: Agarvāl Book Depot, 48 p., Urdu); **Kissā tin tilasm**, by Shrī Ramesh Kumār (Calcutta: Sachdev Pustakālay and Press, 24 p., Hindi); **Kissā sunharī tilism**, by Raghunāth Siñh Akelā (Mathura: Shrī Gopāl Pustakālay, 24 p., Hindi); **Sar zindā dhar murdā, ajībo garīb tilasm**, by Shrī Nishikar (Calcutta: Sri Loknāth Pustakālay, 24 p., Hindi). “**Tilasm**” is a common Hindi spelling of the Urdu “**ṭilism**.”

<sup>18</sup>**Kissā Anjangaṛh kī rāj Kumārī**, by Prem Shañkar Prem Kānpurī (Mathura: Hindī Pustakālay, 20 p., Hindi); **Kissā chaurāhe kī churāil, arthāt bevaḥā māshūkā**, by Prem Shañkar Prem Kānpurī (Mathura: Hindī Pustakālay, 1977, 32 p., Hindi); **Kissā chāndī kī rāj Kumārī**, by Shrī Nishikar (Calcutta: Shrī Loknāth Pustakālay, 40 p., Hindi).

doctor, officer, jail, glass, button, box. The fruits of modern technology--cinema, cigarettes, matchboxes--are sometimes, though rarely, mentioned, and then only in passing; we will look at one or two examples in Chapter Seven. One modern qissa does feature a prison run by demons. After the captives have been fed, “books, newspapers, magazines, etc. came.” (Hindi terms are used for these items.) “Those who could read and write began to read them, and those unfortunates who couldn’t read and write sat silently apart, in solitude.”<sup>19</sup> We glimpse a world in which literacy is a conspicuous ability: enjoyed, noticed, envied.

Far more important, however, are those changes which affect the structure of the plot itself. The hero nowadays may be of lowly birth, and his adventures may have some unusual twist. A poor bird-catcher may become entangled in eerie, surrealistic, rather Freudian magic adventures, and count himself lucky to flee with his life and his bird-net intact, as in **Kissā jāduī totā**. A village sheep-herder may find himself unwittingly married to a female demon (**chuṛail**), with a frightful demon (**rākshas**) son, and barely escape their power, as in **Pretoñ kī nagarī**. A clever village boy may outwit a rich merchant and an unscrupulous thief, in ways which are implausible but not overtly marvelous, and end by winning a kingdom, as in **Kissā chālāk nāī**. Or a heroine may replace the hero and have the usual marvelous adventures, as in **Kissā baheliyā kī beṭī**.<sup>20</sup>

At times, the lives of such humble heroes are even realistically confronted. **Kissā motī kā peṛ** (The Pearl Tree) begins with a charming pictures of village life--followed by a cynical commentary on it.

It was the rainy season, gusts of cool air were surging through the fields. Drizzling down rain, clouds were flying to and fro; sometimes they suddenly collected together, sometimes they scattered and spread out here and there, and the blue sky began to glisten between them. The peasants’ hearts beat twice as strongly. All were absorbed in their work. The rains are falling well, the grain will be good. Why, silver is raining down--silver! There’ll be so much grain that we won’t even be able to eat it!

In the rainy season all sights become very beautiful and attractive. Manoharpur seemed as attractive as if nature herself, adorned and decorated, were entertaining mankind. All the fields were bright green. The village women, talking among themselves and singing songs, were working in their own fields. Here monkeys were swinging in the trees, and there birds were twittering. Elsewhere herds of sheep, finding blades of grass near the doorways, were enjoying themselves. Nowhere was even the least speck of dust visible--wherever you looked, only water and more water could be seen.

In such an attractive season two friends, peasants, were sitting at the edge of the fields talking. Surjū said, “Brother, look what a good season it is. But what is there for us? From morning to night we break our backs, hoping for some results months later. Nowadays the rich men indulge themselves: they must be

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<sup>19</sup>**Kissā dānav desh**, by Pramod Bihārī Saksainā (Hathras: N. S. Sharmā Gauṛ Book Depot, 1960, 20 p., Hindi), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>**Kissā jāduī totā**, by Rūp Viyogī (Hathras: N. S. Sharmā Gauṛ Book Depot, 1969, 27 p., Hindi); **Pretoñ kī nagarī**, by Rāmniranjan Sharmā Alakh (Calcutta: Sachdev Pustakālay and Press, 23 p., Hindi); **Kissā chālāk nāī**, by Shrī Nishikar (Calcutta: Shrī Loknāth Pustakālay, 24 p., Hindi); **Kissā baheliyā kī beṭī**, by Rāmkhelāvan Tripāthī Rukam (Calcutta: Hindī Prachārak Pustakālay, 31 p., Hindi).

relaxing happily in the rooms of their big houses, enjoying the pleasure of the rainy air. While we--we work here all day. And when we hastily grab a bit to eat, and lie down for a peaceful sleep--here a drip, there a drip! Here our clothes are getting wet, there the grain is getting soaked. Do you call this a life? But brother, our fathers and grandfathers remained absorbed in this life, they never even thought such things. They said, brother, that there is no greater happiness anywhere than in the village.”

Mañgal said, “Yes, brother, if it had not been so, then today our lives would not be like this. We too would be indulging ourselves and relaxing in some large house, and would be masters of unlimited wealth. But our fathers were happy in this confinement. After all, they were people of the old times, such was their nature. They used to say, ‘We are happy with whatever our ancestors did, we don’t need anyone’s wealth.’”

Surjū said, “Brother, what was that you were saying about how we could become wealthy? Come on--if you know how to do what your father left undone, you should do it.”

Mañgal and Surjū leave their village--just as it is devastated by a flood. Their subsequent adventures are of the classic marvelous kind. But they never forget their village. When Mañgal acquires a **tilasmī** dagger and conquers a demon, his first thought is for Manoharpur.

The moment he saw that dagger, the Daitya suddenly trembled and sank to his knees, and said, “Now I’m your slave. What is your command?” Then Mañgal said, “You wanted to kill me--now what is it?” Then he said, “That dagger in your hand belongs to my master Hazrat Sulemān. I cannot face that dagger.”

Having thought for a while, Mañgal said, “Well, if you don’t want to fight, and you’re ready to obey me, make my village Manoharpur into a beautiful kingdom. Make all its houses fine marble, make two big palaces for us, and fix up everything for the kingdom.”

The Daitya said, “That’s easy.”

Mañgal becomes Raja Mañgalsiñh, and Surjū becomes his minister Sūrajsiñh--and the two settle happily into their huts-turned-palaces. Both their love and their hatred for the village are neatly expressed in this transformation.<sup>21</sup>

**Kissā dānav desh** (The Land of the Demons) offers an even more striking example of the interpenetration of realistic and marvelous preoccupations. Two villagers, Shyām and Kadar (=Qādir), have been captured by demons who are fattening them up for the table.

Shyām said, “Brother, you’re right to say that we should keep up our courage. But don’t you regret that we’ve come here and been trapped in the clutches of these Dānavs? I keep thinking, here we are trapped, and no telling what shape our families are in.” At this Kādar said, “Shyām, it’s useless to worry about home, because Brother Girū will be looking after things, and our wives too are not so foolish that they can’t manage.”

Having taken heart, Shyām then said, “Brother Kādar, what you say is right, now we have no other choice. It won’t be right to go home without conquering Dānav-land and becoming masters of the wealth here--there is anxiety at home, too. For such a long time we have been sitting around unemployed, and eating. We’re

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<sup>21</sup>**Kissā motī kā peṛ** (Hathras: N. S. Sharmā Gauṛ Book Depot, 1971, 19 p., Hindi), pp. 1-2, 16-17.

pestered by creditors. Now we won't rest until we overpower this **tilasmī** Daitya, so that we can conquer Dānav-land, and take its wealth to repay our creditors with. If we go back empty-handed they'll laugh at us."<sup>22</sup>

By the end of their adventures, Shyām and Kādar have indeed acquired the magic wealth they need to repay their all-too-real creditors. Such brief intrusions of the real world are uncommon, however; even where they exist, they serve chiefly as a foil to the world of marvelous adventure and its fruits. Jolles' "natural and necessary" marvelous is doubly appealing when contrasted with such a patently "immoral" reality.

Although such relatively recent, less established qissas have an interest of their own, this study will be more concerned with the enduringly popular qissas I have called "perennials." I have chosen four of the perennials, and one newer but quite popular qissa, for closer examination. They are presented in roughly the order of their writing: the first two are Fort William productions, the third was probably written in the 1870's, versions of the fourth begin in the 1890's, and the fifth appears in qissa form only in the 1930's. The first is derived from Arabic, via Persian qissa tradition; the second, from Sanskrit; the third, from an original modern Hindi work; the fourth, from medieval Rajasthani; the fifth, from a pan-Indian folktale. The first two describe the noble deeds of royal heroes; the third, the villainy of men as opposed to that of women; the fourth, a passionate illicit love affair; the fifth, the wanderings and adventures of two exiled brothers. These five qissas were chosen to form a group both diverse, and thoroughly representative of the genre.

They were chosen with attention to one more axis as well: that of textual fixity versus textual fluidity. According to the S.A.M.P. publication records--the only quantitative information on qissa printing that we have--the most often printed of the perennials have been **Totā mainā** and **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij**. The modern observer who buys a few sample copies of each qissa will be struck by a conspicuous difference between them. Virtually every edition of **Totā mainā** is identical in text--not word-for-word, but sentence-for-sentence and usually phrase-for-phrase. Changes almost always take the form of simplification, slight abridgement, or Urdu-Hindi vocabulary substitution. The buyer of any **Totā mainā** can thus predict its contents with a high degree of accuracy, whether it was published in Delhi or Calcutta, in Urdu or Hindi, recently or some years ago. With **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** the case is quite the reverse. **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** has been published in 20-page versions and 147-page ones, in versions mostly verse or mostly prose, in versions which disagree so thoroughly that they seem to share little more than a title. The same publisher, at the same time, often issues two variant versions of this qissa. **Totā mainā** and **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij**, in the same genre, almost equally popular, are thus utterly dissimilar in both their degree of contemporaneous textual agreement, and their degree of textual stability over time.

And the sharp dissimilarity of these two most popular qissas extends to the rest of the perennials as well. (About the less popular qissas, printed by only one or two publishers, it is not possible to make such judgments.) A large number of small publishers have had a century or more of total freedom to work their will on the perennials: to preserve, alter, or discard texts at pleasure. And by now the results, however arbitrary they seem, are clear. "Fluid" perennials with varying texts include **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij**, **Lailā Majnūn** and **Triyā charitra**, as well as the two popular twentieth-century qissas **Shīt Basaṅt** and **Gaṅgārām paṭel Bulākhī Dās nāi**. The

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<sup>22</sup>Kissā dānav desh, pp. 2-3.

other twelve perennials have relatively “fixed” texts which are obviously derived in each case from a single original source.

The terms “fixed” and “fluid” themselves, though concise, are also apt to be slightly misleading. “Fixity” usually implies a word-for-word identity in every edition of the text. But qissas are not fixed in this sense. “Fixed”-text qissas should perhaps be called “single-source” qissas, since all editions hover around some one (often clearly identifiable) original text, of which they are close approximations--but not exact copies. And “fluidity” seems to imply a state of total mutability; while since there is at least some central plot common to all versions of a qissa, “varying” might be a better word.

Why should textual “fixity”/“fluidity” be so sharply dichotomized? What factors govern the synchronic and diachronic textual stability of a particular qissa? I cannot answer these questions, but it is important at least to ask them. The answer cannot be a technological one, invoking the inherent nature of the printing process; if printing stabilized texts, then all qissa texts would be stabilized. Nor can the answer be a religious one: since qissa are a genre of secular and entertaining narrative, without ritual contexts or associations, no religious constraints exist--no imperative of accurately reproducing sacred texts or transmitting received versions of sacred stories. And since qissa texts are usually unattributed, and rarely provide information about their own sources, neither are copyright constraints or other safeguards of textual purity in effect. Yet without constraints or sanctions of any kind, many texts have been preserved for a century or more with extraordinary fidelity. Still, if stability is norm, why have some texts remained so widely unstable, when it would have been quite possible to stabilize them as well?

Of the five qissas I have selected for detailed study, the first three have single-source texts, while the latter two have varying ones. Looking at these qissas, I will come to grips with the problem of textual stability as well as I can. At the least, I will be able to rule out some plausible but incorrect explanations, and suggest others more promising. Since printed qissa literature as a genre has never been studied before, I must in any case start from the beginning.

In the next five chapters I will thus look particularly at the problem of textual stability and change. But these chapters will also provide a set of examples and illustrations to be drawn upon in the theoretical discussion in Chapters Eight and Nine. And they will include discussion of the individual history, character, and structure of each of the five selected qissas, as well as substantial translated excerpts from each. I hope I need not make too elaborate a defense of this relatively eclectic and many-sided way of approaching the genre. It might be thought to lack the satisfying concentration and rigor that a more narrow and methodologically pure line of attack could offer. But I expect (with good reason) that the reader will not know the genre at all. I hope to give a sense of it that will be grounded in specific knowledge of particular works--and will only then move to more general theoretical considerations. And if my translations can convey even a little of the appeal of the best qissa literature, I will be happy. For most qissas are built on

the sort of plan which saves even some of the dull romances from total failure and is found in some of the best. It is the simplest thing in the world; scarcely to be called a plot--merely a journey with adventures. Yet what more is wanted to give the romancer his opportunity? It is one of the things that never grow old, from Theseus and Jason to Sir Percival, and so on to the Pilgrim’s Progress and so to modern examples, which anyone may think of for himself.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup>W. P. Ker, **Collected Essays of W. P. Ker**, ed. by Charles Whibley, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1925), 2:323.