13
Significance of Wandering in the Indian Romances

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Introduction

The romances[1] of Hindi literature are traditionally associated with a genre called *premākhyān* ('a love story') that contains oral folk narratives as well as tales from the repertoire of – among others – Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian literatures. The genre distances itself from both South Asian and outside literary traditions, and achieves its own identity (de Brujin 2012: 21). These stories very often feature idealized tales of princes pining for, and undertaking journeys and trials to reach, their beloved princesses.

Premākhyān as a genre is often viewed through the prism of its main works (such as *Cāndāyan*, *Padmāvat*, *Mr̥gāvatī*, *Madhumālatī*, and *Citrāvalī*) with distinct Sufi undertones, and thus *premākhyāna*s have traditionally been analysed primarily as vehicles for religious meanings. Śukla postulated that poems of this genre should be interpreted

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1   The term 'romance' has multiple meanings. Fuchs 2004: 3–11 provides an in-depth discussion of the various meanings of the term, as well as her own definition of romance as 'concatenation of both narratological elements and literary topoi, including idealization, the marvelous, narrative delay, wandering, and obscured identity, that (...) both pose a quest and complicate it' accepted by this chapter.
   In the case of Hindī literature the genre of *premākhyān*, as well as various tales considered similar (cf. McGregor 2021: 150 for remarks on *Maujdīn rī bārtā*) are also of similar nature, albeit Fuchs' definition does not limit romance to a particular genre.

allegorically and that their metaphorical meaning is closely aligned with the symbolism in the text (1946: 94–115). This view was influenced by a symbolic key added to some Sufi works that may have been a later addition rather than a core part of the text (de Brujin 2012: 20). Allegorical interpretation subordinated romances to their symbolic meanings which were esoteric and religious.

More recent scholarship has accepted that many romances do not contain any notion of Sufism (McGregor 2021: 60–3, 148). There has also been a shift in research into the main works of religious significance. Recent scholarship, e.g., Behl (2014) and de Brujin (2012), attempts to break away from Śukla's view on symbolism and offers a more nuanced view of the genre. Behl offers a view that romances have contextual meanings, and the religious meaning emerged in specific, religious contexts rather than being always the primary meaning of the text (Behl 2014: 288–9). De Brujin notes the interplay of worldly and spiritual patronage, and the role of the poet as a mediator (2012: 14). While this new research presents a significant change, it is still concerned primarily with the religious significance of some romances. According to Behl, contextual meanings are not exclusively religious in nature and he primarily tries to reconstruct the contextual meaning that occurred during the Sufi gatherings (2014: 284–5).

What is basically absent, however, is an approach that studies Indian romances as romances and focuses on the structure as well as the typical elements of romances, while not assuming their religious significance. An approach presupposing only that the particular poem is a romance is applicable whether or not it is regarded as Sufi, and also allows us to better appreciate what it is telling us. Thus, this chapter, while recognizing that religious resonances form a significant part of the tellability[2] of many works, attempts to show that a focus on the texts themselves (rather than on specific theories of their religious significance) is productive.

This point will be elucidated by providing examples from the three poems by Jān (*Rūpmañjarī* [1627], *Kāmrānī* [1634], and *Tamīm Ansārī* [1644])[3] that illustrate benefits gained in this way. 'Jān' was a pseudonym of Nyāmat Khān. He was a prolific Braj Bhasha poet

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2   For more on tellability as a concept, see, for example, Baroni 2011/2014. It is important to note that tellability does not concern only the written texts, but also oral transmission, and what Culler calls 'narrative display texts' (1997: 25–6, 91–2). We have no direct way of knowing what the motivations of reciters of Jān's poems were, but we can make an assumption based on their characteristics, as this chapter attempts to show.

3   Dating is according to colophons in his works (Lāhoṭī 2003: 42, 65, 94).

(fl. 1614–1664),[4] the author of several dozen known works. He was a member of the Qāyam Ḵẖānī dynasty of Fatehpur in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan. The dynasty, according to Jān's genealogical poem, descends from the Chauhan prince, Qāyam Ḵẖān, who converted to Islam.[5] This unique background means that he was steeped in both the Rajasthani and pan-Islamic literary cultures; the way romance allowed him to reconcile divergent literary sensibilities will be demonstrated in the analysis of his poems.

Menāriyā notes that most of Jān's poems belong to the genre of love stories *(premākhyān)* (1999: 125). This genre is often rendered as 'romance' in English literature (cf. McGregor 2021: 60, 148). Jān was a member of the Chishti *silsilā* (a Sufi religious order) initiated by *śaikh* Muhammad Chishtī (Gaurāṇ and Gaurāṇ 2007: 65).

The published poems are based on a series of manuscripts published around the fall of Qāyam Ḵẖānī rule in Fatehpur.[6] They repeatedly mention one scribe: Fatehcand Tārācand of Ḍīḍavānā (near Nagaur).[7] The meagre information about the circulation of Jān's poem available to us shows that his poems were most probably recited outside of Fatehpur.

The Understanding of Romance

It should be noted that some researchers have raised doubts about the assessment of Jān's poems as *premākhyāna*s on account of their lack of philosophical sophistication and metaphorical structure (Śarma 2003: 9–10).[8] While the present author does not accept such a view, the irrelevance of such considerations regarding the precise genre of the works will become apparent once the approach to romance taken by this chapter has been explained.

Romance has been widely considered archetypical since the scholarship of Frye (Behl 2014: 283). This has led to attempts to create a framework for work with romances across multiple genres, and to appreciate elements of romance occurring in non-romance genres (like the novel).

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4   The dates are based on Menāriyā (1999: 125).
5   More on the history of Qāyam Ḵẖānī dynasty and Shekhawati region can be found in Miśra (1984, 2018). The genealogical poem in question is in Miśra 2007.
6   Jān 2003a: 66 gives a date of 1714; Talbot 2009: 240 maintains that Qāyam Ḵẖānī lost Fatehpur in the 1730s.
7   Jān 2003a: 66, Siṁghavī 2005: 74, 114, 200.
8   This commentary follows the Śukla tradition of metaphorical interpretation mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Therefore, recent studies on romance have developed a framework for work on texts showing elements of romance regardless of genre considerations. In the words of Fuchs (2004: 2), this approach is more concerned with 'what romance does to text' rather than 'what romance is'.

Such an approach has been common in more recent studies of romance (whether understood as a form, as a strategy, or in some other way). The romance could be characterized as 'a concatenation of both narratological elements and literary topoi, including idealization, the marvelous, narrative delay, wandering, and obscured identity, that (…) both pose a quest and complicate it' (Fuchs 2004: 9). This definition builds on the earlier definition by Parker (1979: 4), formulated as the 'form that simultaneously seeks and postpones a particular end, revelation, or object'. According to both these definitions, a romance may show up in a literary work of almost any genre – and it is this understanding of romance that this chapter shares.

That does not mean that this approach denies the historicity and specific social context possessed by a specific romance tradition. On the contrary, research on romance emphasizes that elements of romance carry changed meanings in different literary and historical contexts (Fuchs 2004: 2, 21–2, 26–9, etc.). Nonetheless, the precise boundaries of the *premākhyāna* genre are irrelevant as long as Jān's work contains elements of romance as a strategy. This chapter will show how it applies to Jān's work.

It should be noted that this understanding of romance is not controversial in research on the Indian romances. Behl (2014: 282) referenced Parker, acknowledged the viability of this approach towards romance, and noted the romance as archetypical. However, this chapter aims to extend their limited discussion to a focus on the special characteristics of romance and their interplay.

Types of Wandering in Jān's works

This chapter is especially concerned with 'wandering', as defined by Fuchs and Parker, and it will show how its workings interfere with other elements of romance listed in Fuchs' definition. However, since 'wandering' is a polysemous word, it will be useful to explicate three of its meanings touched upon in this chapter, namely: a physical journey of a hero; the wandering narrative; and being lost (in the ethical sense).

While the 'wandering' may be a physical journey – and the journeys of heroes are indeed very important for romance – 'wandering'

is much more than just an act of physical journey. It has been noted that wandering both poses and delays certain resolutions. This reveals a very significant feature of romance, and a second understanding of 'wandering' in this chapter: a wandering narrative. Romance often appears in a series of episodes that do not appear to be 'causally' connected with each other in any strong way. This was at the heart of the classical sense of romance, that is, in the genres of Greek and chivalric romance, as a subordinate genre to the 'ordered' epic.

Parker (1979: 23–53) has shown that authors usually have full control of an 'errant' narrative even while they bemoan their lack of control over it. While romance defies expectation, its authors often use 'unordered' narrative to convey important meanings. Parker (1979: 17–19) also noted that romance is often posited as 'errant', an observation she made on the basis of Western literary culture. This criticism, however, was not limited to aesthetic considerations, but was also supported by the ethical condemnation of erring by the Christian tradition. This constitutes an *ethical wandering*: a type of situation in which the hero has strayed away from his journey and succumbed to the (narrative) stasis. The reason is often gendered: he may have been tempted away from his goal by the (primarily female) tempters, or because of other reasons (Parker 1979: 25–30, 66).[9]

While such argumentation is obviously specific to European thought, the sense of 'being lost' as a metaphor for moral erring is hardly confined to European culture. It would therefore be premature to assume that it never occurs in the Indian context, especially since Hindi words such as *bhram* or *gum* contain both meanings.

Seductive Statues and Errant Heroes: An Ethical Erring

Jān occasionally uses a metaphor of being lost in the ethical sense. We will examine two stories where such an episodic metaphor occurs.

Kamrānī (1634) is a short story about prince Prītamdās and his four friends, who all have different livelihoods. During their journey in Kamarupa, the prince spots a statue of Kamrānī in a temple and instantly falls in love with it. Since Prītamdās refuses to leave the statue of his newfound beloved, his friends undertake to win Kamrānī for him by themselves. Kamrānī had been forcibly abducted by king Rām

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9   This was sometimes paralleled by the accusation of the text itself becoming errant.

of Kamarupa[10] after being refused by and warring with the princess' family. The friends use the skills each of them has[11] to reach Kamrānī and free her. Prītamdās and Kamrānī unite, while Rām commits suicide when his plans are shattered (Jān 2003a).

Rūpmañjarī (1628) is a story about prince Gyān Siṅgh, his friend Nyān Siṅgh, and princess Rūpmañjarī. Prince Gyān is an auspicious youth conceived after the asceticism of his father. He excels at everything. Once, after a hunt and deep discussions, he falls asleep and dreams of a beautiful lady. As soon as he wakes up, he is smitten by longing until he calms down, asks his friend for advice, and subsequently resolves to undertake asceticism to see her once again. He thus is granted a dream about the princess, and this time he asks her questions about her name, her home city, and her family. Though a princess, Rūpmañjarī gives him answers in the form of riddles; the prince confers with his friend and solves them. Gyān and Nyān undertake the journey to Rūpmañjarī's home city, where they find her statue. They have a chance meeting with an ascetic and, subsequently, Gyān attempts to elope with princess Rūpmañjarī. Prince Gyān is almost caught by Rūpmañjarī's wrathful father, but an intercession from the yogi convinces the king that Gyān is a mighty *gandharva* and scares him off (Jān 2003b).

Prītamdās comes across Kāmrānī's stone image during his journey through Kamarupa, while Gyān Siṅgh confirms Rūpmañjarī's existence (and presence in a city) when he finds her statue. Thanks to their friends, the princes succeed in freeing the heroines: Gyān Siṅgh elopes with his beloved from her father's home, while Prītamdās' friends free the heroine from captivity by her father's enemy, the vile king Rām.

In both cases, when the princes become enchanted by the statue, they subsequently refuse to move away from it. This is how it is presented in *Rūpmañjarī*:

> He saw with his own eyes a statue [looking] just like the woman
>   from [his] dream,

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10 This is most certainly not the yogic *kāmrūp*, since the name of Rām's kingdom is given as Kãvrū and not Kāmrūp in Jān 2003a: 45. This chapter agrees with editors of Jān who identify Kãvrū with a historic kingdom in North-East India. It may be similar case as usage of extended Mughal world (e.g., Nepal) in *Citrāvalī*, cf. Orsini 2017: 22–3.

11 The merchant provides money; the gardener befriends a servant of his caste and ascertains Kamrānī's whereabouts;, a carpenter makes statuettes [of the prince and princess] that entrance Kamrānī when they are smuggled in; and the digger digs a tunnel to Kamrānī's prison.

[he] rejoiced and swooned and Nyān Siṅgh helped him up.

When Nyān Siṅgh saw the sculpture, he said many times: 'Your
eyes are blessed',

[but then] the prince started to worship it like a priest worships
an idol.[12]

The story of *Kāmrānī* has an even more scathing description:

The prince saw the statue of a woman and became [its] slave at
that moment,

[he] forgot all about obeisance and offerings, as if before [his]
eyes appeared thousands of flowers.

From the moment [he] saw this woman of incomparable
beauty, he became [completely] absorbed [in thinking of
her].

The prince forgot about Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.[13]

The statues supplant the deities, a consequence which is not regarded
positively. Jān follows such episodes with a reproach, as for example,
in *Rūpmañjarī*:

Nyān Siṅgh said: Gyān, why are you in its service and praising it?
It does not have eyes that could see you,

nor does its ears hear anything, even if you would say it a thou-
sand times.

How would [it] say anything without a tongue? [So] it will not
give [you even] a single answer,

it does not walk with us, nor will it place a hand on [your] head.
Why are you in its service and praising it?[14]

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12 *jaisī dekhī hī tiya sapanaī , mūrati vahai driga apanaī,*
rījhi kūvara murachā gati āi, layau ucāi nyānasiṅgha.
nyānasiṅgha hū̃ mūrati hera, dhāna drigu kūvara kahyau bahu bera,
lāgyau kūvara karana uhi seva jyau pujārau pūjata deva. Jān 2003b: 29.

13 *yeka tīya kī dekhī mūrata, kūvara bikā̃nyau uhī mahūrata,*
nimasakāra pūja saba bhūlī, driga āgai sarasaū̃ sī phūlī.
magana bhayau jaba tē taki, bāma anūpama bhesa,
bhūli gayau hai kūvara kaū̃, brahmā bisna maheśa. Jān 2003a: 45–6.

14 *nyānasiṅgha bolyau suni gyã̄na, kahā seva tū̃ karata bakhã̄na,*
yāke to naīnā nahī̃, jo dekhe tuva vora,
nā sravanani kachu sunata hai, jau tū bakahi karora.
rasana binā bolibau dūtara, yeka bāta kaū̃ dētā na uttara,
calata na saṅga na dai sira pã̄ni, kahā seva tū karata bakhã̄ni. Jān 2003b: 29–30.

This reproach is ultimately successful in *Rūpmañjarī*, since the prince eventually agrees to abandon the statue (Jān 2003b: 30).

The language used in the cited passages is somewhat evocative of a lovestruck lover, and on many levels it follows the romance traditions of portraying women as the agents of the stasis[15] (Fuchs 2004: 17–20, 48, 69, etc.). Heroes are lost and incapable of continuing their journey when they are entrapped by a temptress. However, the delay caused by the statue is a little different: the statue does not actively tempt the hero with pleasures but rather misleads him into identifying it with his newfound beloved. Thus, the detour stems from the obscured identity of the statue and the mistaken assumption that the statue is the heroine herself. The pleas of friends and helpers are in fact reminders that their identities are in fact separate.

Why does this mistaken identity matter for the worldview expressed in Jān's works? The imagery is much more reminiscent of a fervent worshipper than just a lover. The statue becomes the sole object of worship. Jān lived in a milieu in which worship of idols was common. In such a framework, there would be no mistaken identity: because the god would be one with his idol and thus the identity of the statue would be one with the deity. However, Jān elaborates (through the mouths of characters in his poems) that this is not the case.

The imagery used here is undoubtedly religious in nature. The princes do not just look at the statues wistfully but worship them. The scene in *Kāmrānī* even takes place in the temple where king Rām has set up a statue to worship the heroine (Jān 2003a: 49). This belongs rather to the realm of worship than the poetics of affection. Moreover, while Jān does not often weave deep Sufi metaphors, he still operates in the context of the hero's search for his beloved, a search with religious significance. Once we accept that the association between the heroine and the divine would be natural to Jān, the whole episode takes on more meaning.

In quoted fragments the statues are said to be specifically blind, deaf, and incapable of perceiving the feelings and entreaties of the princes. Interestingly, this negates the very attributes that idols should have for their worshippers to be heard, thus forming a further pointed criticism of idolatry. The entire episode can be interpreted as a statement that God himself cannot be reached through engaging with intermediaries like idols, and that success can be met only through direct worship. It condemns the practice: by engaging in it, the heroes err

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15 The stasis here refers to the narrative force that delays the resolution of the narrative.

(bhram) away from the narrative that implicitly is that of a Sufi seeker. The narrative tension inherent in wandering is important here: more than just wasting their time, the heroes risk becoming slaves of stasis and never finding their way to their true beloved.

It is interesting to note that in one case stasis succeeds (relatively). Prītamdās of *Kāmrānī* is heedless of admonitions from his four friends and continues to cling to the statue's feet, so that he is almost absent from the subsequent narrative. He takes no part in the search for the imprisoned Kāmrānī or in the plot to free her from an evil suitor who killed her father. The friends take action by themselves and it is through their effort that she is finally delivered to him. Only when he glances at the face of the real Kāmrānī can he act again (Jān 2003a: 48, 54, 59–60). The danger inherent in succumbing to stasis further shows the futility of the hero's idolatry and serves to portray idol worship as more than just a distraction, but a risk that threatens to destroy the entire endeavour. If not for Prītamdās' friends, the real Kāmrānī would have remained a slave of her captor Rām.[16]

There is some ambiguity, however, as far as the narrative structure is concerned. The discovery of the statue starts the plot with Kāmrānī and confirms the presence of the titular princess in Rūpmañjarī.[17] Thus, the statues are necessary for the narrative structure of the poems, while also being distracting and dangerous to the princes' resolve.

The essential elements of this episode – the worshipful imagery, the idols, and finally the friends' words – seem to imply that Jān uses the metaphor of 'erring' to speak about idolatry. While the prince can benefit from the direction that the statues provide during some stages of his journey, he ought to reject it at a later stage. This points to a certain ambivalence. Possibly, Jān sought to subordinate contemporary practices of worship through idols (such as, for example, *saguṇa bhakti*) to his philosophy but deny their significance. Such concerns, however, fall outside the scope of this chapter.

Although these episodes are not very prominent in the poem, their presence demonstrates that wandering as their structural element translates into a fuller understanding of the work as a whole.

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16 Notably, Rām also engages in idolatry as he himself commissioned the statue and is said to worship it. Jān 2003b: 49.

17 I am grateful to the reviewer for this valuable insight.

Identities and Religious Answers: Wandering and Wondrous Narratives

Tamīm Ansārī is a poem that concerns the misfortunes of Tamīm Ansārī, companion of the Prophet Muhammad. This character is more widely known as Tamīm ad-Dārī, the 'intrepid traveller' of the Arabic tradition.[18] His story has some religious significance as it is treated like a hadith about the figure of the false Messiah in the Islamic tradition.[19]

Tamīm has been spirited away by a flying jinn *(pret)* from Medina and his wife is unable to find him. His family has to fend for itself for four years before they can make ends meet. Then his wife eventually asks caliph Umar ibn al Khittab (referred to as Umar Khitāb) for help, but the money she is given is eventually depleted. Three and a half years later, Tamīm's wife applies for the right to marry again and is granted her request by Umar. The following night Tamīm returns amid a storm, and a confrontation with his wife and her new husband ensues. Although Tamīm wins, this does not imply that his family, or alarmed neighbours, are sure of his identity. Though no one recognizes him, his knowledge of matters in the neighborhood ultimately convinces people that he is not a returned bad spirit. Tamīm is advised to apply to Umar's court for his (erstwhile) wife's return. The next morning, Tamīm arrives at court and begins his story, aiming to get his wife back. The story itself is constructed from short, relatively unconnected episodes. It culminates in the sighting of the 'false Messiah' (Dajjāl) and Tamīm's subsequent return to Medina on a storm cloud.

Śarma (2003: 9) presents a traditional reading of *Tamīm Ansārī* in which Tamīm is understood as a typical Sufi seeker.[20] Śarma's interpretation shows the problems inherent in reading the poem in a way that ignores its romance elements. Interpreting *Tamīm Ansārī* as a purely metaphorical story of Sufi spiritual quest has proven impossible. To make metaphors fit, Śarma had to rely on details that are not mentioned in the extant text of the poem. Such is the case with the *pret* that Śarma holds to symbolize ignorance on the account of its black colour. It begs the question as to why such an important detail would be totally

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18 The name 'Tamīm Ansārī' seems to have originated in Persian poetry where he is called both Tamīm Ansārī and Tamīm Dārī (Ethé 1896–1904: 322). On the literary traditions surrounding ad-Dārī, see, for example, Bellino 2009.

19 This hadith is very exceptional as it is transmitted on the authority of Tamīm himself rather than the Prophet.

20 Its translation has been appended at the end of this chapter.

omitted from the extant text.[21] However, this conjecture is still more plausible than Śarma's other assertion about metaphorical meaning: that the hero's wandering started with a sin because he had decided to unlawfully abandon his family. There is only one passage in the poem that explains the circumstances surrounding Tamīm's vanishing, and it reads as follows:

> I told my wife: 'Give me water' [but] she laughed and paid no attention at all,
> Angered, I looked at the pond and then immediately left my home and went [there].[22]

While it is theoretically possible to interpret the verb *calyau* as an indication that Tamīm is about to abandon his family, it seems more probable that he just went to the pond to fetch water himself. This reading would also avoid contradicting the Arabic traditions that Tamīm is captured during ablutions before sexual intercourse with his wife (Bellino 2009: 202). When attention is paid to such details, the neatly ordered metaphor falls apart. However, the main flaw in Śarma's interpretation is that, in order to emphasize the coded and metaphorical nature of *Tamīm Ansārī*, he omits a great deal of explicit religious teaching.

While the more traditional interpretation fails, reading *Tamīm Ansārī* with its romance features in mind will highlight its explicit religious significance and explain where it lies. Moreover, such a reading will allow for an appreciation of the complex narrative structure designed to provide enjoyment to the audience.

And where is wandering in *Tamīm Ansārī*? The answer is rather obvious: for the entirety of his tale Tamīm wanders in search of a way home. Yet, as has already been said, in the case of romance wandering usually 'both pose[s] a quest and complicate[s] it' (Fuchs 2004: 9). Would this still be relevant? What other quests would be connected to Tamīm's journey?

As has been mentioned, one of the defining elements of the romance is 'obscured identity': Tamīm himself acquires such an identity. In this

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21 Obviously, there are some combinations where colours can be understood just from context, as when mentioning the common plants, birds, etc.; it does not seem that *pret* would follow similar conventions. Moreover, Śarmā appears to follow the conventional reading where it is understood that romances contain coded language, and it seems doubtful that coded language would be purposeful if it was omitted.

22 *Maĩ tiya kaũ bhākhyau dai pānī, una hāsi kaĩ dī ānākānī,*
maĩ risāi kaĩ tākyau tāla, ghara tẽ nikasi calyau tatkāla. Jān 2003c: 72.

context, it is important to note that there are two texts in the poem: the primary text about events in Medina and an embedded narrative of Tamīm's journey. Although events in Medina have no obvious narrator, they are seen from the perspective of Tamīm's wife. One learns only about her side of the story, meaning that Tamīm was apparently taken away by the *pret* and never came back. Even after he eventually reappears, the narrative continues to present information from the point of view of Tamīm's wife. Instead of specifying that Tamīm returned on a storm cloud, the description of the circumstances is as follows:

> From there came a raincloud shining with lightnings,
> suddenly a very dark night came on, you could not see anything
>   even if you strained your eyes.[23]

Moreover, this passage not only reveals what Tamīm's wife knows, but also creates a mood conducive to further depictions of the hero. In fact, very soon afterwards follows a description of Tamīm that conveys a premonition of evil forces at play:

> With long nails and body hair [as if] on fire he looked like a *pret*
>   in some disguise,
> his wife screamed in fear then, and [her] new husband came to
>   kill [Tamīm].[24]

This is not a mere description of a stranger: it is meant to evoke an image of a ravenous *pret* and serves to suggest that the returned hero may not be who he seems to be. When Jān notes: 'the wife felt as if it was a returned *pret*' (Jān 2003c: 69), the audience does not know any better. Other circumstances serve to further the wife's version of events: none of the neighbours really recognizes Tamīm and, when the hero is finally sent to Usman's court, they do not hope for any particular verdict. The audience knows nothing other than the wife's claims that all Tamīm's knowledge could have been stolen by an evil spirit.

The consistency with which these efforts are undertaken – Jān does not once move the focus from the wife's point of view – marks this obscuration as intentional. Thus, Jān understood that the obscured identity of

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23 *tāhī mẽ āī ek ghaṭā, barasata camakata dāmina ghaṭā,*
    bhaī bahuta andhiyārī raina, sūjhata kachu na pasāraĩ naina. Jān 2003c: 68.
24 *gura nakha roma ughāraĩ āga, lagyau preta hi kaisau sãga,*
    tiya ḍarakaĩtaba sora macāyau, nayau puruṣa mārana kaũ āyau. Jān 2003c: 70.

Tamīm is significant enough to warrant planning the narrative frame around it. Once Tamīm's identity is established as suspect, he is sent to Umar's court. As the court is a place where the caliph gives verdicts, it is to be understood that Umar will issue a verdict on the identity of the hero. A resolution is promised, but before that a testimonial is needed. Thus, it is through the story which Tamīm tells that his true identity may be established. At the same time, however, the misfortunes and tribulations of the hero are the main source of delay in the poem. Thus, Tamīm's journey leads to the resolution – because the testimony is necessary for Umar's ruling. At the same time, such wondering postpones the said resolution because of endless hold-ups and detours; it clearly creates the tension in which the audience would be left wondering about the truth.

The structure is of note: the poem is composed of short episodes that constantly morph into one another. There is almost nothing that carries over from one episode to another, and that makes summarizing the plot inapposite. The various twists of the plot are meant to be part of what constitutes the tellability of this poem. The audience may lose itself in its wandering through preternatural landscapes. It is through this wondrous journey that the tale of Tamīm ad-Dārī is known: it is here that this hero may prove himself to be an 'intrepid traveller'. The unpredictability means that the audience is not privy to the knowledge of how the episode ends.

One short fragment conveniently illustrates the unpredictability of the plot. The fragment is preceded by an episode in which Tamīm's ship sinks and his raft eventually makes it to the shore, but the next verses bring a drastic change of mood:

> [Then] I came off [the raft] and did not tarry at all, I came for-
>   ward to one mountain,
> I climbed [it] and jumped off [it] so I would die – but I didn't die.
> [Then] I became angry and went into the forest (…).[25]

There was no prior indication that Tamīm would be dejected enough to try to end his life. Moreover, these circumstances are never discussed again nor are they part of a wider story in the tradition of Tamīm ad-Dārī. It seems that its primary function is to further create narrative tension. The episode is situated just before the story culminates with Tamīm meeting with the prophets Ilyās and Dajjāl, both of whom have roles to play

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25 *haũ tab utaryau karī na bāra, āgaĩ āyau yeka pahāra, tā ūpara haũ caṛhi kaĩ paryau, marana heta pai nāhi na maryau. taba uṭhi bana me gayo risāya* (…). Jān 2003c: 88.

in Islamic eschatology. The doubts about the hero's identity culminate in this episode: the listeners may be expecting the hero to achieve the tasks ascribed to him, but such interruptions may shatter their confidence.

So, is the audience truly meant to doubt in Tamīm? It is rather doubtful that Jān's intention would be to besmirch a holy man of his religious tradition. However, while it would be almost unthinkable to doubt the religious authority of an esteemed Companion of the Prophet, it is not impossible that Jān would confront a Tamīm-imposter with a truly returned Tamīm. Thus, the obscured identity does not mean the audience distrusts Tamīm's authority, but rather is unsure of how the story will proceed. It amplifies the audience's enjoyment without compromising the religious significance of the hero and his journey. This is significant since the narrative tension makes romance enjoyable to listen to, but there is potentially an additional, religious rationale for telling the story. Rather than being obscured by metaphors, however, this knowledge is presented outright. Tamīm often makes inquiries and is given explanations, but they are framed as an explanation of what has transpired earlier:

> Trembling [with fear], I returned to the hermitage and
> explained what I saw,
> [and then] I fell at his feet and said many times: 'Please, explain
> to me all the secrets!
> Who was the holy man [Brahman] who sent me to you? [And]
> who are you who have shown me so much love?
> Who was this old woman who has uttered the dreadful words?'
> 'This [one] who sent you to me was Iliyās,
> I am Khidr[26] myself and I will fulfill all the desires of your mind.
> The adorned woman you saw was Lakṣmī whose work is to
> deceive everyone,
> [and] those words that fell into your ears, were Yājūj's[27] words
> reaching you.'[28]

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26 Both Khidr and Ilyas are connected with Islamic eschatology. They are associated with helping people in desperate situations, they may have drunk the water of life to attain immortality, and they are said to possibly appear at the end times. They appear as two holy men whom Tamīm meets – and they help him reach Medina (Wensinck and Vajda 2012; Franke 2022).

27 Yājūj, together with Mājūj, form a pair of evil beings (or evil people) associated with the eschatological narrative in Islam. They are said to be walled off behind a wall that they will only be able to overcome during the last days, when they are prophesized to ravage Earth (Cook 2013).

28 *kā̃pata āyau purakhā pāsa, jo dekhyau so karyau prakāsa,*
bahuraū kahyau lāgi kē̃ pā̃i, bhedu sabei dījai sujhāi.

The obscured identity appears once again: the supernatural incidents happening may be as much a mystery for the audience as they are for Tamīm, and so there is a need for an explanation–resolution. What is a lesson on eschatology also becomes the answer to the mystery in the story that the audience may yearn for. It forms a literary strategy: it is worth asking what purpose would it serve.

It should be remembered that Jān shared sensibilities with people of his milieu, but there was an ideological and political difference with regard to the predominantly Hindu milieu pervading Shekhawati, as he himself acknowledged in *Kāyam Khā̃ rāso* (Talbot 2009: 223; Miśra 2007: 23, 26).[29] *Tamīm Ansārī*, however, is a story of religious significance.[30] It seems doubtful, however, that the cultural milieu of small Fatehpur supported highly specialized contexts, such as gatherings of Sufi initiates capable of elucidating various significant religious points relevant to poems like *Mirigāvatī*. It is far more likely that a possible recitation took place before a mixed audience, and at least part of it would have been motivated by non-religious concerns. Thus, Behl's framework of contextual meaning would prove insufficient (2014: 282–4, 288–9).[31]

The lack of specialized contexts may present a problem. While an author initiated in Sufi *silsilā* may be motivated to convey eschatological details (as the story of Tamīm is understood to be a hadith),

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brahu ko jin tum pāsa paṭhāyau, tum ko jita hitu itau janāyau,
kaun taki maĩ bridhā nārī, kina bānī bhaivanta ucārī.
Jina paṭhayau tū mere pāsa, vahu to hai bhāī Iliyāsa,
khvāja khijara haũ āpuna āhi, tere mana kī pujaũ cāhi.
gahinau sajē ju dekhī bāma, hai lachimī chala hī saũ kāma,
vahu hai sabada paryau tuhi kāna, vahu yājūja sabda pahicāna. Jān 2003c: 92.

29 While we should avoid essentializing the (declaratively) Hindu population of Shekhawati, the surrounding royal courts were predominantly Rajput Hindu courts that ideologically linked kingship with Hinduism. Thus, Islamic religious elements would certainly not be sufficient to patronize Jān's poems in surrounding courts – though we do not know where Jān's poems were performed.

30 Tamīm is still revered by Indian Muslims, primarily in South India.

31 While it can argued that the individual social context of the listener would influence their horizon of individual understanding, Behl does not seem to understand 'context of performance' subjectively. He wrote that 'meaning is contextual in that performances of these poems could be either entertainment or courtly poetry or a blueprint for the serious business of enlightenment, depending on the context of reception', and then in 'the different contexts of performance (court, salon, and shrine)' gave us a hint about what meaning 'social context' seems to have in his argument, and Jān probably did not benefit from these different contexts in Behl's sense (2014: 289).

presenting them as religious instruction could prove an insufficient motivation for many of his potential listeners. In order to solve this problem, Jān deliberately chooses the genre of romance. The obscured identity allows the religious teaching to be portrayed as an answer to the mystery, while wandering builds narrative tension and expectations for these answers. In addition to its religious role, together they add an alternative feature of listenability[32] and tellability to the poem. This does not mean that religious and aesthetic considerations in tellability are opposed to each other. Jān (and the people reciting his poem) undoubtedly enjoyed the poetics of wondrous wandering just as much as people in his milieu.

The result is a text that exhibits multiple layers of meanings in the context of a single recitation, rather than different meanings in the context of different recitations. While for part of the audience listenability undoubtedly derived purely from the pleasure of enjoying the piece, they were nevertheless influenced by its religious undertones. This resulted in both greater inclusivity of religious teachings and the possibility of openly transmitting them to an audience motivated by a variety of nuanced reasons for engaging with the poem.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the focus on wandering results in new readings that are different from several earlier interpretations. Although none of the analysed poems are well known, they have been subject to interpretations, which have not addressed

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32 The 'listenability' proposed here would be a quality similar to tellability. While tellability itself is concerned with what the potential narrator thinks of the reception of their story – since it is pointless to tell a story that fails to attract the attention of an audience – it does not account for a situation where there is a divide between a potential narrator and their audience. In such circumstances, it can occur that some parts of the story can hold a different significance to the (potential) narrator and to their audience.
Such a situation is exemplified by the case where a parent tells their child a fable with moral lessons. While both parties accept that the tale provides entertainment (tellability and listenability), its educational qualities (tellability) may be far less important to the child than to its parent. It is worth noting that the aim of this model is not to imply an unbridgeable divide between Jān and his audience. (Although Jān's involvement with Sufism to an extent sets him apart from much less involved members of the audience.) Rather it is to underscore the purposeful approach Jān takes to widen the appeal of his stories.

the issues raised in this chapter – all the more reason why this approach seems productive. Our attention is drawn to those passages in the text where the narrative is interrupted and wandering occurs. As has been demonstrated, this may happen as a relatively isolated occurrence, for instance in *Rūpmañjarī*, where the hero wanders off the path for a while but soon finds himself on it again. In *Kāmrānī*, such wandering is more prominent: although it occupies only a small part of the plot, it effectively removes the prince from it. Finally, *Tamīm Ansārī* serves as an example of a story in which wandering is a central feature of the narrative structure. It becomes nearly impossible to interpret its occurrence without considering its place in the poem's overall structure; it lies rather at the core of both the tellability and the listenability of the romance. The focus on wandering in romance helps to make it more inclusive. Besides, the ubiquity of this genre across cultures has made it a source of poems aesthetically appealing to people across cultural and religious divides.[33] This makes it easier to explain how it was possible for a popular story to exist that contained overt Islamic teachings, while these teaching were expected and anticipated even by listeners with no obvious interest in Islamic religious doctrine.

Appendix

Longer Passage: Interpretation of Tamīm Ansārī (Śarma 2003: 9)

Tamīm Ansārī, the hero of the tale *Tamīm Ansārī*, who is unreasonably angry at his wife, resolves to leave home, a breach of Quranic precepts since the head of the family is responsible for its maintenance.

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33 A strain of literary criticism, starting from Frye (1976), proposes that romances are archetypical in character. If such assertions are accepted, then elements of romance would naturally be common across cultures. In any case, the romance in Hindī, specifically, is connected to the Persian romance to the point that some consider the romance (as a genre) an expression of the Persian *masnavī* genre in Hindī (cf. McGregor 2021: 26–7 remarks on *Cāndāyan*). In light of such a tight connection the question of intercultural attractiveness is trivial: if Persian audiences had not appreciated the romance elements inherent in the *masnavī* genre, then *masnavī* would not have prospered; if Indian audiences similarly had not appreciated romance, then we would not have a thriving tradition of Avadhi romances. While this issue could be explored further, it falls outside of the scope of the present chapter.

A black-coloured evil spirit *(pret)* is a symbol of the ignorance into which Tamīm Ansārī has been sinking until now. It is the reason he has to suffer so many troubles to meet with his wife again. As soon as Tamīm is conscious of his mistake *(ġaltī),* his mind instantly becomes pure *(pāk).* He is subjected to the temptations of diamonds, pearls, gold, etc. but is not affected by that at all. His only goal is to meet his progeny and wife after reaching Medina and, after trying many ways [to return], he finally arrives there. However long the path of ascetic practices *(sādhana)* may be, if a practitioner desires to endure it, nothing is impossible. That is what Jān wants to tell through his tales. In addition to that in some places the poet demonstrates the holiness of the Quran and the greatness of Islam.

कथा तमीम अनसारी का नायक तमीम अनसारी अकारण ही पत्नी पर क्रोधित होकर घर से बाहर चला जाता है जो कुरान के पवित्र सिद्धांतों का उल्लंघन है, क्योंकि पुत्र कलत्रादि की परवरिश का जिम्मा परिवार के मुखिया का होता है। कृष्णवर्णीय प्रेत अज्ञानता का प्रतीक है जिसमें काफी समय तकतमीम अंसारी डूबा रहता है। यही कारण है कि अपनी ही पत्नी से पुनर्मिलन हेतु वो अनेकानेक कठिनाइयां झेलता है।अपनी गलती का ज्ञान हो जाने पर अंसारी का मन एकदम पाक हो जाता है। हीरे-मोती एवं स्वर्णादि का लोभ बार-बार उसके सामने आता है, लेकिन वह इससे तनिक भी विचलित नहीं होता है। उसका एक मात्र लक्ष्य मदीना पहुँचकर पुत्र कलत्रादि से मिलना है और अनेक विध उपाय कर वहाँ पहुँच जाता है।साधना का पंथ चाहे कितना ही लंबा क्यों न हो, साधक अगर उसे पर करना चाहे तो कुछ असंभव नहीं है। यहीं कुछ कथानक के माध्यम से जान कवि कहना चाहता है । उसके अतिरिक्त जगह जगह कुरान की पवित्रता एवं इस्लाम की महानता भी कवि ने दिखाई है।

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