

IN PRAISE OF MUHAMMAD [II]: SINDHI POEMS

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The region of Sind, currently a province in southern Pakistan, was among the earliest areas of South Asia to come under Islamic rule. In the year 711 A.D., a small military force in the command of a remarkable seventeen year-old Arab general, Muhammad ibn al-Qāsim, set out from Iraq to avenge the capture of some Arab Muslim women by local pirates. This small Arab force conquered Sind and created a state along the Indus valley, establishing the first modest foothold for Islam in the area. In subsequent centuries, the presence of Islam grew stronger as Sind received many Muslim immigrants from Central Asia, Iran, and Afghanistan, including a large number of Sufis or Muslim mystics who made it their home. Thanks to the activities of these saintly men, a significant portion of the local population came into contact with the Islamic mystical tradition and gradually became Muslim.

Like Muslims the world over, Sindhi Muslims have utilized their native language to express the high esteem and affection which they feel for Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. In this regard, much of our previous discussion on the veneration of the Prophet and its poetic expression in Urdu is equally applicable to Sindhi poetry. Many of the themes we have encountered in the Urdu poems -- the Prophet as guide, helper, friend, beloved, intercessor -- are prominent in Sindhi poetry as well. However, Sindhi poetry in honor of Muhammad possesses certain features that give it a rather unique character.

Sindhi developed several distinctive poetic genres for eulogizing the Prophet. The most important of these is the maulūd. Literally, the word maulūd means the newly born child. Since the birth of Muhammad was a significant event in the history of humanity, songs composed in his honor came to be called maulūd, emphasizing the greatness of the new born child. In con-

trast to the *maulūd* or "birth-poem" in other Islamic languages, the Sindhi *maulūd* is a short lyrical poem of 5-10 verses whose contents include not only the original topic of the Prophet's birth into this world but also various aspects of his life and character. In addition, Sindhi poets often express in the *maulūd* their love and affection for Muhammad as well as their yearning for the his city, Medina. Patterned after the indigenous poetic forms of the *wāī* and *kāfī*, Sindhi *maulūds* always possess a *thal*, a beginning verse that is repeated as a refrain. The last verse is often a signature verse containing the name of the poet who usually takes the opportunity to offer a supplication to the Prophet. According to one Sindhi manual, *maulūds* are meant to be recited in "a sweet and harmonious voice," either by an individual or a chorus, so that the listener's heart is "correctly guided." To this day, *maulūds* are popularly recited throughout the villages and towns of Sind, not only at religious assemblies and gatherings but during weddings, general occasions of rejoicing as well as times of mourning.

In addition to the *maulūds*, several other literary genres are used to pay tribute to the Prophet. Of these, the *madāh* and the *munājāt* are closely related in substance and style, being strongly influenced in their metre and rhyme schemes by the Arabic panegyric form of the *qaṣīdah*. While both are laudatory poems usually comprising 50 verses or more, the *munājāt* contain many more supplications of the composer to God and the Prophet, seeking blessings and alleviation of personal difficulties and problems. In the *madāh*, the laudatory element predominates; in the *munājāt*, the supplications of the composer are paramount. Similar to the *madāh* and *munājāt* are the *manāqibā* whose distinguishing feature is that instead of laudation in general terms, they use stories pertaining to the biography of the Prophet as vehicles of praise. In other words, the *manāqibā* are narrative-cum-didactic in character, employing stories of a "historical" nature from Muhammad's life to illustrate superior qualities of his character and achievement. For recounting the miraculous or supernatural incidents in the Prophet's life, a Sindhi poet may

compose a mu'jazo (plural mu'jazā) in which the miracle becomes the central theme for laudation.

Beyond the variety of its poetic genres, Sindhi poetry in praise of Muhammad is remarkable for its attempt to indigenize the figure of the Prophet to local Sindhi cultural and literary milieu. Typically, he was represented in symbols and idioms that were familiar and agreeable to a Sindhi audience. For this purpose, many Sindhi poets adopted into their eulogies the symbol of the virahinī or a loving and yearning young woman, usually a young bride or bride-to-be, who is tormented by the absence of her husband or lord. Most likely originating in the plaintive songs sung by village women in periods of separation from their husbands, this symbol and the associated concept of viraha, "longing in separation," occurs in almost all the vernacular literatures of South Asia. The virahinī has enjoyed widespread popularity in a variety of South Asian religious contexts where she is often identified as a symbol for the human soul. Such usage is in keeping with Indian literary conventions according to which the human soul is always to be represented in the feminine mode, that is as a woman, before a deity who is male. The most renowned use of the virahinī in Indian literature occurs, of course, in poetry dedicated to the Hindu god Krishna. In this poetry, the gopīs (the milkmaids), and in particular Radha, express their longings for union with their elusive beloved. Jain, Sant and Sikh religious poetry, too, have their virahinīs. Within an Islamic context, the virahinī appears in many genres of vernacular Sufi poetry ranging from the romantic epics of Awadh to the folk songs of Punjab and Bengal. Indeed, she is a standard character in much Sindhi mystical poetry where she is always to be interpreted as symbolizing the human soul in its long quest for God. There, the woman-soul endures much pain and suffering as she burns in divine love, and frequently dies from intense longing. The use of the virahinī, then, in Sindhi poetry devoted to Muhammad, the longed-for beloved, is in some ways hardly a surprising development.

In keeping with the literary conventions of the woman-soul symbol, the Sindhi poet represents himself as a virahinī who

can no longer bear the agonies of being separated from her beloved, in this case, the Prophet. Not surprisingly, the language and vocabulary he employs are typical of the idiom of Sindhi women, utilizing linguistic forms such as the diminutive for tender and affectionate address. Only the Prophet, *Muṣṭafā* ("the chosen one"), can put out the fire of longing that consumes this young lady. Love for the Prophet afflicts the *virahinī* like a sickness for which he is the only cure. Out of intense desire for him, for being in his presence, the Prophet's faithful *virahinī* is so anxious to visit his mausoleum at Medina that the very "love for Medina" is difficult to bear. She undertakes the gruesome journey, traversing difficult, desolate distances to prove her love. As she approaches her destination, she sees the minarets of the Prophet's mausoleum -- a sight that acts as a soothing balm for her tired and burning eyes.

Yet the most dramatic aspect of the *virahinī* symbol recalls the image of the young bride-to-be and her impending marriage with Muḥammad. The representation of the Prophet as a bridegroom, the bridegroom prince of Medina, is a distinctive feature of many Sindhi panegyrics. Particularly in the *maulūds*, we find condensed references to a host of terms and images pertaining to weddings in Sindhi society: the henna night, when the bride's hands and feet are stained with henna; the noisy processions of rejoicers; the bridal party anxiously awaiting the arrival of the turbaned bridegroom mounted on a horse or a camel; the showers of flower petals; the expensive gifts; the fragrant wedding bed on which have been strewn pearls and roses. The poet employs this imagery to allude to the true nature of the woman-soul's devotion to the Prophet in a form that arouses immediate associations and emotions among their listeners.

In addition to the symbol of the Prophet-bridegroom, Sindhi poets utilized another literary device, equally fashionable in Sindhi poetry, namely, the use of folk tales and romances as allegories. According to this convention, a poet includes in his composition references to popular Sindhi folk romances and their heroes and heroines. He does not narrate these

tales for he assumes his audience is well aware of the details. Merely by using significant words and phrases, he judiciously refers to those tales that feature a virahinī and a prospective bridegroom. In this way he continues to preserve a consistency in the overall symbolism.

A tale particularly favored in many maulūds is the Sassui-Punhuñ romance. It has a simple-plot. Sassui, the adopted daughter of a washerman, was the boast and beauty of the town of Bhambhore, and a considerable sensation in society. Punhuñ, a handsome Balochi prince, much to the distress of his noble father and brothers, not only falls in love with her but stays with her family as a lowly washerman, until he finally is able to marry her. Outraged by his behavior, Punhuñ's brothers, through force and stratagem, manage to kidnap a very drunk Punhuñ from Sassui as she lay peacefully asleep. Upon awakening, the deserted bride is heart-broken and desolate. She sets out, alone, in pursuit of her beloved on a fatal two hundred mile march across a dreadful desert and still more dreadful hills.

For the Prophet's panegyrist, the heroine Sassui is the virahinī, separated from her beloved Punhuñ. She represents the soul who longs to meet the beloved Prophet (Punhuñ), ready to undergo all trials and afflictions in the process. Consequently, the poet assumes the persona of Sassui and addresses the Prophet as Punhal, an affectionate form of Punhuñ:

Dear sweetheart, I will not forget my beloved, the Prophet
 For you, I spread my hair as a mat, o Punhal, my prince!
 Beloved, more fragrant than musk and ambergris is your sweat;
 On account of your beauty, the moon sacrifices itself [5].

Though the Punhuñ of folklore was a Balochi, the Punhuñ of the maulūds is, of course, the Prophet. Hence, he may alternatively be addressed as Hāshimī, that is, coming from the Banu Hāshim, the Arabian clan of the Prophet. The poet may also allude to Sassui's arduous journeys in quest of her beloved. Or he may capture Sassui's agony and pain as she awakens from her sleep to find her friend Punhuñ has disappeared. She is distraught, there is no reason for staying any longer in her town Bhambhore. She is

determined to set out in pursuit of him, even if it means being ground by the "fist of death."

O girlfriends! How can I bear this? I, who am walking towards
the beloved Punhun
While awake, I weep; while sleeping, I have no peace;
Thoughts of the Hashimite friend overcome me!
Sisters, staying in this Bhambhore is poison to me!
The fist of death grinds me along the road;
Seizing me by my roots, love has carried me away!
The grasped hem no longer remains-[in my hands]; I live but
my life is gone!
The "rebel" 'Abd ar-Ra'ūf says, treat me kindly:
I am going to the Prince of Medina and I will return [71]

Selections from madāḥ and munājāt

[Note: Above each of the poems occurs the poetic pen-name of the composer with the page number from the original Sindhi text in parentheses; for complete citation, see bibliography.]

Faqīr Ghulam Haidar [137-8]

For God's sake, pay heed to my complaint, O Muhammad, the chosen one;
But for you I have no other support, pay heed, O Prophet the guide.

You are the true chief of all the prophets and messengers; the breath of life of the pīrs⁷;
O perfect leader, for you they recite thousands of ṣalawāt and kalmah;⁸
They have all been freed by your hand, you are the master of all leaders;
My champion hero, means of my protection, pay heed to my complaint, O Ahmad [Muhammad]

At every moment, o leader, humans and angels recite blessings on you;
Be it the heavens or the earth, the tablet or the pen, they all recite happily;
O Ahmad, remedy my faults; dispel this pain and misery;
O Ahmad, listen to my sighs, O lord, listen to my cry!

You are God's pure light, the master of the universe, the prince, [Yours] is the rule of the two worlds, the luminous heart of the morning sun;
You are the refuge of sinners; the minister of the One and Only;
Be mindful of me, efface this sorrow; listen to my supplication, O Ahmad!

O master, I remember you! Guardian, I long for you!
In trouble and distress I think of no one else but you;
O perfect one! my eyes look towards you, with clasped hands I lament;
O master, listen to my urgent cry; pay heed, O Prophet, the guide.

⁷pīr -- Persian title for a holy or spiritual enlightened person.

⁸kalmah -- the profession of faith in Islam: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger."

O Prophet! You are light, pure and holy; the master of the apostles;
 Be mindful of me, dispel this sorrow; I desire mercy, o compassionate one!
 O intercessor for sinners, you are for everyone in the universe;
 I need help, O Muṣṭafa [the chosen one]! O resplendent one! I am a [rebellious] sinner.

Your devoted lovers perpetually weep for you, O prince;
 For your intercession, they recite thousands of blessings and greetings on you;
Ghulam Haider, the slave, sings your praise day and night;
 O believers, recite always the kalimah for the prince messenger:

There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God.

Ḥasan [231]

By the divine name, the Omnipotent, the Concealer [of Faults], O Prophet!

Help me, my master, my leader, O Prophet!

Whatever pleases you is pleasing to God as well,
 You are the ruler of God's kingdom, O Prophet!

Without doubt you are the cause of the creation of possibilities,
 For you God created the entire universe, O Prophet!

To be a slave at your door is the glory of kings,
 You are the commander of all [God's] messengers, O Prophet!

God made your religion victorious over the religions of the world,
 See now the strength of the infidels, O Prophet!

"After God you are the greatest, let's cut the story short!"
 You are the most special of God's pious, O Prophet!

Make me perform the ḥajj,⁹ call me to your door;
 Oh that I may be a pilgrim and your visitor, O Prophet!

Everything has a limit except for my sins!
 I am sinner beyond all limits, O Prophet!

I am very weak, confused, and anxious;
 Except for you there is no one to help, O Prophet!

Do not look at my sins; forgive my trespasses,
 I am very weak and destitute, O Prophet!

But for you no one can intercede for me,

⁹ḥajj -- the pilgrimage to Mecca.

I am a member of the [Muslim] community, you are the community's support, O Prophet!

During the agony of death, in the grave, and at resurrection, help me,

O support and refuge of [rebellious] sinners, O Prophet!

If you so desire, God will forgive the sins of creation, Hasan is one among the sinners, O Prophet!

Selection from manāqibā

[Note: The poetic pen-name of the composer occurs above the poem with the page number from the original Sindhi text in parentheses; for complete citation, see bibliography.]

Faqīr Muḥammad Māchī [149-51]

A manāqibo of the Prophet (peace be upon him) concerning the perpetually hungry person

Ibn Abbas, the narrator, relates

That a person joined the Prophet's companions.

He was a merchant with limitless wealth.

Coming in front of Prince Ahmad [Muhammad] he made a request:

"O true Messenger of God, beloved apostle!

The guarantor for the weak on the day of judgement!

Apostle! please be kind as to come to my house;

Accept my invitation, out of your benevolence,

So that my wealth becomes lawful;

It will not be right and proper without my feeding the intercessor."

Having extended the invitation, he returned home.

That gentleman had prepared every variety of food;

Earthen jars of Egyptian honey were made into sweet sherbet;

A thousand places were adorned with cloth and ornaments;

In four directions were erected colorful fountains with shade;

Everywhere there was the fragrance of musk.

A crowd of people arrived and the bridegroom [the Prophet] entered the house;

With a special welcome, he came and sat on a couch.

The people who were in the house, all became humble,

And came forward into his presence with clasped hands and in awe;

To that sweet bridegroom, they offered innumerable gifts and offerings.

Then that gentleman served the Prophet food:

A tray of pulāo¹⁰ with a special meal.

There came to that place a person,

A pagan who was extremely hungry.

Coming before Ahmad [Muhammad], he began to plea:

¹⁰pulāo -- a rice dish made of rice boiled in soup with flesh and spices.

'O true Prophet of God, the beloved of Medina!
 I am ill, O apostle, sick!
 My stomach is never full no matter how much food I eat;
 My hunger never subsides; the entire day I eat!
 Give me a remedy for this affliction, O Ahmad, a cure!
 Medicine has made no difference; I just keep eating lots of food;
 Give me a remedy for this affliction, my beloved!
 So that I can have faith in you and be free from this malady."
 Then God's beloved said to that sick man:
 "Take a bath for you are dirty;
 Wear clean clothes and make yourself pure;
 Then come and eat with me this delicious food."
 Obeying Muhammad's command, he took a bath,
 Cleaned his body and the clothes on his limbs,
 And came respectfully before Prince Ahmad [Muhammad].
 Saying "In the name of God the most beneficent, the most merci-
 ful," he broke bread;
 Together with the beloved, he began eating food;
 He had eaten only half a plate of rakibī from all this food,
 When he suddenly withdrew his hands from the food and said before
 the beloved:
 "I was satiated with merely the millet cake and my body feels
 constricted;
 I recite the profession of faith on the Prophet, the intercessor,
 and the proper ṣalawāt;
 Remove infidelity from my heart and corrupt thoughts;
 Keep in my heart always friendship with certainty."
 The Apostle's Mā'chī says, "Enter the divine way."
 Mā'chī says, "See what an astonishing thing, the noble one, the
 Messenger did;
 Ahmad [Muhammad] always does well by those under his protection:
 He surmounts difficulties; satiates the hungry; and has bad deeds
 forgiven by God."
 Faqir Muhammad says, "Obey the Prophet, the sweet Muhammad, the
 chosen one;
 Never forget him because he is God's special friend;
 He is the provision for salvation; there is absolutely no other
 support.
 Always recite ṣalawāt on the noble Prophet as well as blessings:
 Those who recite the kalmah will depart [this world] with faith."

 There is no god but God and Muhammad is His messenger.

Selection from the mu'jazzā

[Note: The poetic pen-name of the composer occurs above the poem with the page number from the original Sindhi text in parentheses; for complete citation, see bibliography.]

Valan Valhārī [130-132]

The miracle story of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the doe

God Almighty with His power created the world,
And from His light the Lord produced the Prophet [Muhammad] --
The chief of all the prophets.

Now, the miracles of Ahmad [Muhammad] are famous in many nations.
Here I relate the story of the doe; listen, believers, to what
has been narrated:

A hunter, having set a noose-trap, lay in wait at a certain
place.

A doe, venturing to this spot, suddenly was ensnared.

Unable to think of any other means of escape, she called out to
the Prophet.

Hearing her cries, Muhammad came and inquired:

"Why do you call for help, doe? Why do you grieve?"

She replied, "Master, I have left my two dear little children
hungry in the desert.

O Muhammad, will you stand as guarantor for this weak one?

I will go and return as soon as I have fed them some milk."

The noble Prophet, with his noble hands, undid the snare and
released her.

The doe ran swiftly away in the direction where her children
were.

Just then, the foolish hunter returned and approaching the
Prophet he said:

"Out of love of hunting, I torment lives.

There was a trapped doe at this place; where did you let her go?

Who are you? where are you going? what is your name?

Either produce the doe or give me a quick reply."

The Messenger [of God] told the hunter, "Patience, my dear sir.

My name is Muhammad, the trustworthy one.

The doe has given me a promise that she will return;

I stand as a visible guarantor for her.

As long as the doe does not return, I will remain at this spot."

The hunter was not at all convinced; he immediately

flew into a rage, became abusive and threw a tantrum.

"I have been patient for an hour; God knows another hour and
quarter may pass!

Neither gold nor money will buy the exact same doe!"

[Meanwhile] she [the doe] resembled a whirlwind in a great speed

for the fawns were nearby in a delicate sleep.

She began calling softly in the shrubs for her young ones.

Hearing their mother's calls, the little fawns awoke:

"Dear mother, we have been here for several days.

Never have so many cries for help been made from such longing.

Today your body quivers; tells us the news candidly."

She said: "I was grazing on a pasture eating grass for my food

when I was ensnared in a noose-trap so that I was in great pain.

I pushed hard, I exerted great effort,

but with the pushing the ropes tightened around my head and neck.

My strength was exhausted: how would they [the ropes] ever break
or loosen?

Finally, with longing, I called out for the Prince Messenger
[Muhammad]

And that Arab, the refuge and the protector, came.

I have left behind the Prophet, the guide, as my guarantor;
So dear children, take heed, I have to suckle you hastily.

I have to return so that I am not late;

I cannot break the promise I gave to the generous one.

My body trembles out of fear for the knife."

At once, from the teats, they said:

"We, too, are coming to the place where the Prophet of God is.

Let's go, lead us speedily to the master.

Lest the hunter be angry with the true messenger."

So they, too, departed from that place taking the road.

They entered the court and the presence of the Prophet.

The fawns, coming and falling on their knees, began

To kiss with their lips the feet of that noble one.

The hunter, upon seeing this miracle, attained faith [in Islam],
saying:

"I truly acknowledge you, the giver of light to the community.

Now, revered sir, give the good deer permission to leave."

On account of kind compassion, she [the doe] merrily skipped away
with her fawns.

Whoever seeks refuge in the master [Muhammad], they escape harm.

Those who recite the kalmah, they are the people of paradise.

There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God.

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