



THE ROMANCE OF
Raja Rasalu
AND OTHER TALES

This is a book that is meant to be enjoyed. Based on versions by three colonial storytellers, Flora Annie Steel, R.C. Templeton and Charles Swynnerton, who transcribed these tales from the original Punjabi as told by the story tellers and bards of the Punjab, it offers a compendium of tales including the romance of Punjab's legendary hero, Raja Rasalu. Capturing the joyous ethos of the Punjab and in keeping with the requirements of the folk or wondertale, the stories which are at once robust, funny, violent, sexual and romantic are peopled simultaneously by animals, birds, humans. Here boundaries of good and evil, of real and imagined, of animal and human, are constantly, and skillfully getting subverted, as they provide a pleasurable entry into the rich and variegated world of the wondertale.

Additionally, there is the very new and unique element of a visual text; not one that necessarily and literally 'illustrates' the wondertale, but one that acts as a parallel and independent text, telling its own story, encouraging the reader to unravel its own mysteries, to spot birds hidden in the foliage, messages inscribed in the text, and to 'see' a different universe.



*The Romance of Raja Rasalu
and Other Tales*



کس راجا دا بیٹڑا، کیا تمہارا نائوں؛
کہاں تمہاری نگری، کہاں تمہارا تھانوں؟
راجا سلواہن کا میں بیٹڑا، رسالو میرا ناں؛
سیالکوٹ ہماری نگری، وہی ہمارا تھانوں۔

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Map of Rasalu's world: Kaif Gill at the GIS Lab of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Lahore.

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Introduction

This collection of stories has been put together primarily for pleasure. To share with readers the carnival delights of the Punjabi folk or wondertale. Whether the act of reading these stories is one of discovery or remembrance, will depend on the geographical location and generational difference between readers; between those who come to these stories from another context and those who, while belonging to the culture that has bred them, belong to a generation that knows only the transient pleasures of satellite television and the glitz and glamour of today's consumerist entertainment. There will be others too, who heard them as children; for well into the twentieth century and many years after the British folklorist, R.C. Temple discovered that "in the Panjab the folktale (was) abundant everywhere ... (and) ... the wandering bard live(d) in every village and hamlet, in every nursery and zenana, and wherever the women and children congregate,"¹ storytelling continued to be part of the family's evening entertainment. This collection, therefore, is also an attempt to retrieve a rapidly disappearing oral tradition from the clichés and banal uniformities, the unresting images and consumerist extravaganzas that constitute so much of today's popular cinema and electronic entertainment. To enable the eye to take rest amidst the marvels and wonders of a world that, having withstood the erosions of time, is both strange and familiar in a time grown disenchanted.

While not part of some nationalist quest to create a 'Volksgeist' rooted in a time-escaped golden past, this collection is a political act to the extent that it affirms the value of a genre that lost ground not just to the authority of the written word and the book, but to the exigencies of history and the political imperatives of the British Raj. In Europe, the narrow concept of popular culture born in the pre-Romantic period, sanitised the folktale and deprived it of its component of folk laughter and the rich and varied culture of the marketplace. In the case of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, the oral tradition was heir to a different history. The folktale was devalued by the colonial encounter, not only because it was subjected to the patronising scrutiny of a European aesthetic, but because of its association with a subject peoples and the fact that most often it was the repository of the "old wife and the bard"² as represented by "the bhat, the mirasi, the bhairan, the jogi, the faqir and all that ilk,"³ who were at best seen as a "sorry set of drunkards."⁴ It merited attention only to the extent that it provided the colonial administration with insights into the "native" mind and "furnish(ed) much useful information as to the manners, habits, and feelings of the natives of Hindustan."⁵ Ironically, this process did not end with the Raj. In the newly created Pakistan, the folktale, along with other narrative forms that comprise the oral tradition, fell foul of officialdom's post-Independence attempt to construct for the people an exclusive 'Muslim' identity rooted in Saudi Arabia rather than in its own soil. The folktale, with its roots reaching back to a time far older than Islam's official advent in the subcontinent, and affirming a syncretism at odds with an exclusivist polity, did not come within the ambit of this agenda.

But the folktale is more than the sum of the manners and habits of the peoples to which it belongs. Predating the written word and the book, these oral narratives are not so much an "autobiography of a people" as an imaginative apprehension of the known and knowable world in which the boundaries of the permissible and the impermissible were charted out, even as the element of the marvellous that characterises the folk and fairytale endowed them with the potential to "open up spaces for dreaming alternatives."⁷ The view that the folktale is an "omnivorous" genre,⁸ cannot be gainsaid. Heterogeneous and anarchic, it depicts a varied and undifferentiated world where high romance mixes and mingles with the homespun wisdom of ordinary people; where animals speak and princes of unparalleled valour and lineage keep company with carpenters, tailors, bhandis, doms, mirasis, thieves, parrots, hedgehogs and horses; where saints and holy men, villains and ogres, peerless beauties and buffoons, shape-shifters and rogues rub shoulders, and the irreverent exuberance of people's laughter bubbles up to demolish alike the pomp and circumstance of kings, the austerity of saints and the grim ideologies of those who would reduce the cosmos to their own narrow, monochromatic circumference.

For the world of the folktale is full of surprises. Replete with marvels and prodigies, it is also an egalitarian genre. Not only do its roots go back to a time when, as part of the oral tradition, it was communal property and expressed the needs and wishes of ordinary people, and which were to become, with time and the authority of the written word, the repository of marginalized people such as women, mirasis, bhandis and others of "that ilk," but because its form allows for the mingling of the seriousness of the high with the uninhibited humour of the low to grant them equal value. Its eclecticism along with its ability to transgress categorical boundaries and labels extends to language-use and narrative forms, for it draws upon the time-enclosed conventions of the vaar and epic as freely as it does on the open-ended impromptu topicality of jests and riddles, the formal plenitude of the kissa and dastan, the lyricism of the dhola and mahiya, the bawdy irreverence of the sithni as well as the gossip of the marketplace and the intimacies of the zamaana to tell its tale,⁹ even as the promiscuity of its terrain enables the pleasurable convergence of the actual and the fantastic to open up worlds of undreamt possibilities.

The aim of this collection is to restore to ourselves this rich heritage, and in so doing, perhaps to recall the lure of storytelling and a time, when the day's work done, some aunt, grandmother or father could be persuaded to unravel a story of marvels and wonders to a group of listeners of varied ages, drawn together by the magic of the tale's unfolding. For the storytelling genre does not know footlights.¹⁰ The boundary that demarcates the space between the audience and performance in theatre and the cinema or television screen does not exist here. This is quite literally a dialogic space. The narrative thread may lie firmly in the hands of the storyteller and the trajectory of each telling depend on the mood and memory of the narrator, but the intimacy of the listening circle generates an interaction that is qualitatively different from the relationship between the book and the reader, of the viewer and

the cinema screen. Encouraging a more active participation, it makes room for the occasional interjection, nod of recognition or even a question that opens up a new dimension in the tale and listening experience. For if the tale is new for some, for others it traverses familiar ground, drawing upon a common store of cultural memory and earlier tellings. To be part of a storyteller's audience then, is very different from that of reading a work of fiction, for apart from the seduction of the tale itself, the allure of storytelling lies in its performative dimension; in the intimacy of the connection between the narrator and listeners that suspends disbelief and enables entry into an alternative domain of rich possibility.

However, the ease with which the wondertale appropriates and incorporates different narrative traditions belies an underlying order, for it depicts not so much an anarchic as an alternative world that has its own protocol and is subject to a particular formal and thematic structure.¹¹ Folk and fairytales build a second life and a second world outside officialdom where accepted hierarchies of the strong and weak, the mighty and the meek, the human and animal, the feminine and masculine are often reversed or subverted to shed a new light on the relations of women and men and between those who have power and those who do not; even as at times sexual identity blurs, is shot through with ambiguity and becomes interchangeable. The ease with which female protagonists not only slip into the male persona once they have disguised themselves as men but also are accepted as such bears witness to this. In so far as their form and structure is concerned, stories often start with a prophecy, an interdiction or the advent of a stranger that acts as a trigger to subsequent action. The Punjabi folktale is no exception to these rules. Thus Salwahan may not look upon his sons Puran and Rasalu for the first twelve years of their lives if he is to ensure the safety of his throne, and the entry of the stranger or outsider, in this case the Rani Luna as stepmother and wife of an aging king, disrupts both family and kingdom as her transgressive love for Puran creates the conditions for Rasalu's future exile [The Story of Puran Bhagat]. Similarly the hero or heroine sets out on a quest, either to find someone – it can be a lost brother or sister, but most often is an elusive beloved – who has been magicked away or glimpsed in a passing dream or a painting; or to find an object desired by a person in a position of power, as in the case of the king who orders the princess masquerading as a man to find and bring back, on pain of death, the priceless brocade for the queen [The Princess and the Ghouls]. The hero or heroine who leaves home usually falls into either one of two categories as 'seeker' as in the case of the blacksmith's daughter [Ghulam Badshah, his Son Gul and the Blacksmith's Daughter] or as victim, as in the case of the king whose fateful and fated defeat on the battlefield marks the beginning of an exile that triggers the course of action in the tale [The Princess and the Ghouls]. There is also the role of what folklorists refer to as the "donor" or "provider" who enters the scene usually after the advent of the quest. Encountered accidentally either in the forest or on the road, the donor, who may be human or animal, either promises help or gives

the seeker some object, usually magical, that allows for the "eventual liquidation of misfortune"¹² or ensures success in the quest. However, before the gift or object can pass into the possession of the main protagonist, a series of tests have to be passed. These may consist of certain conditions that have to be fulfilled or, less directly, may be based on the tone, manner and attitude of the hero or heroine in his or her dealings with the donor. Kindness and courtesy to strangers, no matter how unprepossessing, pay. Discourteous behaviour and selfishness don't. Thus time and again, the "heart of Rasalu is moved within him," and ensures success in his different ventures. His downfall comes when, forgetful of the injunctions of the Fakir at Tillah Jogian, never to draw his sword against the innocent, [Rasalu's Conquests] he injures and humiliates the blue buck Hira in a fit of masculinist pique [Rani Kokilan and Raja Rasalu].

The stories in this book have been selected and compiled from four texts transcribed in the latter half of the nineteenth century by British folklorists and comprise *The Legends of the Panjab*, by R.C. Temple (1884), *Tales from the Panjab*, by Flora Annie Steel (1894) and *Romantic Tales of the Panjab and Folk Tales from the Upper Indus* by the Reverend Charles Swynnerton (1893 and 1892 respectively). Few changes have been made to the original texts; some of which are editorial and others necessitated by the amalgamation of three versions of a story into one. In the latter case, details of the version used have been identified in the endnotes. However, in keeping with generic norms, I have exercised my right as storyteller to add a gesture here and remove an embellishment there, so that even though the storyline remains the same, the meaning shifts a little. The stories themselves have been divided into two sections, with the first comprising an aggregate of tales from the Rasalu legend, and the second of shorter stories of adventure, magic, comedy and romance. The former, which has a specific geographical location - for Rasalu was the son of Raja Salwahan of Sialkot and descendent of Vikramjit, "who sold himself in charity three hundred times" [Rasalu's Birth and Exile] - partakes of the tradition of the *vaar* or epic and high romance and is replete with doughty deeds, while the latter, for the most part are characterised by the remoteness of their setting and magical interventions, although the comic tale can sometimes provide an exception by laying claims to a particular habitation and name. Swynnerton sets the date of Rasalu around 800 A.D., though he acknowledges that this is largely conjectural as there is no solid historical evidence to support his argument. But his statement that Rasalu lives in popular memory is borne out by the fact that his stories are still part of the repertoire, albeit of a rapidly shrinking circle of storytellers in the towns and villages of the Punjab, and the places associated with him and his brother Puran do exist.¹³ Tillah Jogian, where he met the fakir lies in the hilly terrain of district Jhelum at not too great a distance from the city of Jhelum, the Gandhgarh hills where Rasalu vanquished the giants and where the youngest, Thirya, lies imprisoned in a cave, are in Attock tehsil south of the Chach plain; the hills of Khairi-Murat, which, quite probably are the same as those of

Kharimurti, where the Rani Kokila grew up and lived out her brief span of life among eighty peacocks, eighty-six mainas and eighty parrots that kept company with her, [Rani Kokilan and Raja Rasalu] lie in Fatehjung tehsil not too far from Rawalpindi, while the well associated with his elder brother Puran, is to be found in the environs of Sialkot, where, it is said, women still come to beg the saint's intercession for sons.

However, despite the topographical specificity of the Rasalu legend, in general the folk and fairytale is not bound by geographical borders. It is a nomadic genre, and its motifs and plotlines travel long distances and are "passed on across borders from distant origins,"¹⁴ acquiring local characteristics and picking up the nuances of language use, idiomatic turns of phrase and the rituals and minutiae of life specific to the culture in which they take root. This is exemplified by the Fables of Jean de la Fontaine "that are commonly assumed to represent the apogee of Gallic urbanity," although their founding inspiration lies in the Panchatantra, the originative collection of seventy tales, attributed to the brahmin sage, Bidpai, which was put together in India in the eighth century A.D. and a copy of which the writer came upon in 1660's Paris.¹⁵ Paradoxically, this cultural specificity is a necessary component of a narrative form that rejects the claims of time and history, as it enables the narrator to create a world that is at the same time familiar and strange, yet whose strangeness enables it to confront and deal with recalcitrant reality. Its familiarity lies in the recognisable details of word and gesture; its strangeness inheres in the remote anonymity of its setting, in the human interaction with fantastic beings and in the instability of appearances. Woven together, these seemingly disparate qualities are responsible for the necessary element of dramatic tension in the story even as they create the space, which allows for the gratification of desire.

The generic characteristics of the folk or wondertale are easily identifiable in the stories in this volume. The heroes are handsome, brave and tenderhearted, the heroines are beautiful if not exactly sweet-tempered and mild, and the villains for the most part, truly evil. Two factors, however, seem to set them apart from the European mainstream as exemplified by the Grimm brothers and Charles Perrault and appropriated and universalised by the commercial compulsions of twentieth century 'culture industry' typified by the vacuity and saccharine sweetness of Walt Disney's round-eyed maidens and wooden-faced heroes. These are (i) a relative lack of violence in the final denouement when justice is meted out to the wicked, and (ii) the representation of female protagonists as 'active' subjects rather than as passive objects of desire. There is a definite absence of the Cinderella syndrome in these tales. These differences, which raise a host of questions regarding the underlying politics of folk literature as a nineteenth century European cultural construct, highlight the importance of historical contexts and the politics of transcription and at the same time draw attention to the intrinsic relationship between narrative form and content.

In Europe, specifically Germany, the process of collecting, documenting and reworking folktales was part of the nationalist search for a *volksgeist* located in an ancient past but informed by the spirit of Calvinist reform and the ideology of Original Sin.¹⁶ In British India on the other hand it was closely linked to the colonial project to understand the workings of the 'native' mind. Given this contextual difference, it would be surprising if both Indian and European folktales were to follow the same trajectory. It would appear that though oral narratives travelled across space and time, they retained their 'storylines' even as they charted their own cartographies, acquiring and shedding details in accordance with the ambience of a particular cultural moment and the whim of the storyteller and the audience. As such, the oral tradition operates at two levels: the linear, which follows the flow of chronological time and contexts, as stories are handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, and the spatial where the concurrence of events from different moments of history and lived experience imaginatively apprehended, come into play on the undifferentiated terrain of the *wundertale*. With the passage of time and the emergence of written texts, this stream came to be intercepted at different historical moments by writers, folklorists and researchers, who attempted to capture and fix the fluidity of the spoken narrative in the written word shaped by the politico-cultural imperatives of their particular time, even as the living stream flowed on, sometimes alongside the written or literary text, and often subsumed by it. Bidpai's *Panchatantra* composed in the eighth century A.D. is among the first known instances of such an encounter between the oral and the written word in India; in Europe according to Zipes, the "literary folktale" entered the scene at the end of the seventeenth century. Though this issue falls outside the scope of this introduction, it merits some comment as well as further research for another reason too, which is to see how far the stories in this volume are representative of the larger body of tales in this genre as it developed in the Punjab and what are the changes they underwent in the process of selection, revision and retelling by different narrators – in this case the village bard or storyteller, the *munshi* who transcribed the story in the vernacular and the '*memsahib*' and '*sahib*' who rendered it in English.

It is unlikely that nothing was changed or lost in this process, especially as this particular transition from the oral to the written word was made across languages and cultures and shaped by the power dynamics of class, caste and colonial hierarchies. A quick glance at the recording technique adopted by R.C. Temple, shows that the folklorist's ostensible aim in this case, was exact replication of the tales, and not, as was the case with German folktales, to rework them in the image of nineteenth century nationalist aspirations and bourgeois propriety.¹⁷ At the same time, Temple's comment regarding "the Indian literati ('s) ...contempt for the language of the vulgar" and their reluctance "to acknowledge it on paper if they can help it," combined with "the itch they possess for 'improving' the language of the bards,"¹⁸ along with the fact that while the portions recorded in verse were

in the "rough local dialect," viz Punjabi, the "prose (was) the ordinary current Urdu of the day,"¹⁹ points to the inevitability of a considerable degree of change or loss of meaning in the oral narratives, the 'master's' vigilance notwithstanding.²⁰ Admittedly speculative, this argument was borne out by our own abortive attempt at recording directly from the oral tradition. A few stories told by Baba Inayat of village Bunga Mallan, District Kasur, were recorded at the Simorgh office and highlighted the difficulties inherent in this process, particularly when the storyteller and listener are located at different levels of a gendered class hierarchy. In our case the relationship between the storyteller and recorder or audience was shaped by the dynamics of a cross-class, rural-urban, male-female encounter²¹ and resulted in impediments to the flow of the stories because of the storyteller's compulsion to introduce English words like 'aunty' and 'ayah' for the benefit of his urban 'English speaking' audience and to sanitise it in deference to the class-gender factor. However, despite the unwarranted hesitations and breaks in narrative flow that would normally have been liberally interlarded with robust Punjabi swear words, the tale he told was of 'Bopo Lutchi' as opposed to the rather Italianised 'BopoLuchi' of Flora Annie Steel's *Tales of the Punjab*. And despite Baba Inayat's concern for the feminine sensibilities and purported gentility of his audience that resulted in a heavy reliance on euphemisms, his version was very funny and distinctly bawdy, which Flora Annie Steel's is not. In her case, perhaps the result of determined editing on part of munshi and Victorian memsahib alike.

In comparison with the work done on the European folktale, the Indo-Pakistani and certainly the Punjabi folktale has been far less written about. In order to gain some understanding of the move from the oral to the written word, a brief look at the process of collecting and recording tales that were to become famous as the 'Grimm's Fairy Tales,' provides useful insights into the underlying politics of the process of transcription and documentation.²² Writing about the ways in which the Grimms selected and reworked German folklore, Jack Zipes argues that "what 'deserves' to be preserved – whether it be high, middle or low art – depends on the 'cultivators' of culture" and "since culture has always largely been a class matter, its cultivators have always been part of a consortium of the ruling social groups in history."²³ Given this factor, it is to be expected that the move from the protean fluidity of oral narratives that travelled from mouth to mouth and generation to generation and had as many voices as the times they were told, to the institutionalised enclosure of the German folk should have resulted in narratives that reflected the concerns and class interests of those who placed them there. This argument is borne out by the changes made by the Grimms while editing the tales. According to Zipes again,

[The Grimms brothers] eliminated erotic and sexual elements that might be offensive to middle-class morality, added numerous Christian expressions and references, emphasised specific role models for male and female protagonists according to the dominant patriarchal code of the time, and

endowed many of the tales with a "homey" or *biedermeier* flavor by use of diminutives, quaint expressions, and cute descriptions.²⁴

The two examples provided by Zipes, one from *Snow White and the other from Rapunzel* illustrate this argument and show how the written word appropriates and in a sense reinterprets the oral text to suit its own interests:

Rapunzel - 1812 Edition

At first Rapunzel was afraid, but soon took such a liking to the young king that she made an agreement with him: he was to come everyday and be pulled up. Thus they lived merrily and joyfully for a certain time, and the fairy did not discover anything until one day when Rapunzel began talking to her and said, 'Tell me, Mother Gothel, why do you think my clothes have become too tight for me and no longer fit?'

Rapunzel - 1857 Edition

When he entered the tower, Rapunzel was at first terribly afraid, for she had never laid eyes on a man before. However, the prince began to talk to her in a friendly way and told her that her song had touched his heart so deeply that he had not been able to rest until he had seen her. Rapunzel then lost her fear, and when she (sic) asked her whether she would have him for a husband, and she saw that he was young and handsome, ... she said yes and placed her hand in his. ... Meanwhile, the sorceress did not notice anything, until one day Rapunzel blurted out, "Mother Gothel, how is it that you're much heavier than the prince?"²⁵

The difference between the two passages is apparent; the first is down to earth and unselfconscious – there is no mention of this being the first time that Rapunzel sees a man. Rapunzel gets over the initial alarm caused perhaps by the shock of seeing a stranger instead of Mother Gothel, and soon takes a liking to the king. It is an equal relationship in which the two come to an agreement and live "merrily and joyfully" until Rapunzel's naïve comment alerts the fairy to the true state of affairs and propels the story to its violent climax. The second passage is much longer and the tone is sentimental. The image of the maidenly Rapunzel's fearful first encounter with romance and the handsome, smooth-talking prince belong to a middle class drawing room courtship, with its undertones of repressed sexuality, while the 'marriage proposal' and Rapunzel's placing her hand in his are resonant with the spirit of genteel propriety with the sugar-icing of permissible romance.

Snow White - Ölenberg Manuscript 1810

When Snow White awoke the next morning, they asked her how she happened to get there. And she told them everything, how her mother, the queen, had left her alone in the woods and gone away. The dwarfs took pity on her and persuaded her to remain with them and do the cooking for them when they went to the mines. However, she was to beware of the queen and not let anyone into the house.²⁷

Snow White - 1812 Edition

When Snow White awoke the next morning, they asked her how she happened to get into the house. Then she told them how her mother had wanted to have her put to death, but the hunter had spared her, and how she had run the entire day ... So the dwarfs took pity on her and said, "If you keep house for us and cook, sew, make the beds, wash and knit, and keep everything tidy and clean, you may stay with us, and have everything you want. In the evening when we come home, dinner must be ready. During the day we are in the mines and dig for gold, so you will be alone. Beware of the queen and let no one into the house."²⁹ (emphasis added)

Once again, the first version is shorter and with little or no embellishment. Snow White has been abandoned by her evil stepmother, and seeks shelter in the dwarfs' home. They pity her and persuade her to stay, asking in return that she cook for them. It is a simple arrangement reflective, probably, of the give and take among the lower classes in pre-capitalist times that minimises Snow White's sense of obligation to the dwarfs.²⁹ They provide her with a roof over her head, and she cooks for them. In the second version, on the other hand, not only are gender roles clearly demarcated, so are the boundaries between public and private space, with the former belonging the dwarfs: they go to the mines and dig for gold - and the latter allocated to Snow White and which she must guard and let "no one into..." The dwarfs may pity her, but it is pity regulated by the capitalist spirit in which nothing comes of nothing. The offer of shelter is conditional and the tone minatory: "If you keep house for us ... you may stay with us..." The item-by-item identification of each household chore, replete with the hausfrau's pride in domesticity, with each task presented as a special treat for Snow White, grants it the 'homey' flavour Zipes mentions, with an added blend of Calvinistic sternness. Clearly the dwarfs are getting a good deal. One wonders what the Snow White of the 1810 Olenberg Manuscript would have felt about this carefully measured charity. Surely she would have been tempted to rush back to the less deliberate and uncharted perils of the enchanted forest, and it was only the malice of the wicked queen that led her to accept the dwarfs' offer.

Other than the suppression or excision of the sexual dimension and with it the element of people's humour, the most noteworthy addition to the tales by the Grimms and also by Charles Perrault, whose works together have become part of the cultural heritage of the European and Anglo-American worlds, is a calculating and punitive morality. Which is not to say that the Punjabi folktale is free of retribution, violence and revenge. In the stories including in this collection, punishment is certainly visited on villains, but it lacks the quality of bloodthirsty vindictiveness to be found in the Grimm brothers' collection of German fairytales.³⁰ In Cinderella, for instance,

When the bridal couple (Cinderella and the prince) set out for the church, the oldest sister was on the right and the younger on the left. Suddenly the pigeons

pecked out one eye from each of them. And as they came back from the church later ... the pigeons pecked out the other eye from each sister. Thus they were punished for the rest of their lives due to their wickedness and malice.³¹

Similarly, in the Six Swans, the "wicked mother-in-law was tied to the stake and burned to ashes" (p.185), in Snow White, the 'evil queen' is made to put on red-hot iron slippers and dance until she falls down dead, (p.204) and in The Pink Flower, the old king has the villainous "cook torn into four parts" (p.286). In the sampling of tales in this collection on the other hand, Sirikap's punishment for his cruelty and cunning, though humiliating, does not match the degree and kind of violence witnessed above: he is made to draw lines with his nose on a red-hot griddle till it is badly singed [Rasalu Rasalu and Raja Sirikap]. There are not too many instances of the 'villain' being actually killed as punishment for his/her crimes. The two examples in this collection being those of the giantess Bhaggarbhatth who meets her end in a cauldron of boiling oil [Rasalu and the Rakshasas of Gandgarh], and the smooth-talking crow with the vagrant eye who fraudulently claims the Swan-wife for his own, and is shot for his pains [Raja Rasalu and the Swans].

This choice of villains deserving extreme punishment is significant, as the two pose fundamental threats to what constitutes the cornerstone of patriarchy viz the patrilineal, patrilocal conjugal unit. Bhaggarbhatth represents a rampant female sexuality and the adulterous crow is no respecter of marital sanctity. That of the two, Bhaggarbhatth meets the more horrific death - to be shot with a pellet from Rasalu's sling is far preferable to the agonies of being boiled in oil - is understandable. The crow after all is caught doing only what other men do - or would like to do. His is a visible crime - easy to understand, easy to detect and therefore easy to check, but Bhaggarbhatth, "covered with hair to her ankles, and whose teeth were just like the iron points of ploughshares," hints at and somewhere equates female sexuality to subterranean primeval drives and provides a glimpse of the disorder on which socio-cultural order rests. By so doing it draws attention to this order's inherent vulnerability, for even in the best and most carefully monitored social arrangements, paternity can always only be a matter of conjecture: a fact that sends the certitudes and sanctities of lineage, class and caste purity, property and laws of inheritance spiralling off into the realm of uncertainty and doubt. It is hardly surprising that on seeing Bhaggarbhatth, Rasalu, who has just withstood the force of magical storms and killed all but two of the giants, should be terror-stricken as he cries out to his parrot: "O Shadi, woe to you, and woe to me, and woe to us all! ... No doubt we shall here be eaten alive!" Both narrative technique and the sequence of events leading up to Bhaggarbhatth's death shed an interesting light on the use of the grotesque as literary and narrative technique that first expresses the fear associated with female sexuality and then expels and overcomes it. Covered with hair and with teeth like ploughshares Bhaggarbhatth can only excite terror, but the description of the same figure skittishly prancing around

Rasalu makes her ridiculous and transforms her into a figure of fun thus dispersing fear through laughter.

That the Crow and Bhaggarbhatth should face summary death while Sirikap, who has built a gateway of skulls of the men he has killed, beheaded his own brother in a game of chaupar and has agreed quite readily to sacrifice his infant daughter Kokilan to save his life, is merely discomfited and made to look ridiculous, provides interesting insights into the workings, value systems and patriarchal mores of the sub-continent. If in the European folktale punishment is meted out for the more inclusive sin of disobedience, in the subcontinent it has a specific focus. Bhaggarbhatth's presence, which threatens patrilineal verities and the crow's perfidy, which violates the taboos of the Ramayan, the edicts of the Ten Commandments and the Code of Hammurabi, emphasise the universality of the woman's status as property and the man's control over her sexuality in patriarchal cultures. Sirikap's gate of skulls on the other hand, though reprehensible, is an indicator of the king/father's power. It is condemnable only in that it signifies excess – and not because killing people is intrinsically wrong when it comes to rulers and monarchs. How else, after all, can the territorial integrity of kingdoms and the obedience of subjects be maintained? Marina Warner knows what she is talking about when she claims that the "bubble of nonsense," comprising elements of magic and fantasy that are intrinsic to the folktale, simultaneously hides and recalls harsh realities.³²

Transiting from the oral to the written text, the Indian folktale, representing the colonised Other³³ of the Raj, was spared the blend of parsimonious morality that informs the post-nineteenth century European folktale.³⁴ This explains the virtual absence of the Cinderella syndrome in the Punjabi folk as it does the primness of the Grimmsian Rapunzel. Orientalist folklorists were under no compulsion to idealise or glorify the stories they came upon. If anything, the tricks and deceptions, the uninhibited engagement with bodily functions and irreverent humour which are the stocks in trade of the folk tradition, may have been read as hallmarks of an 'inferior' culture and as windows to the workings of the native mind. In fact in this encounter between the Punjabi folktale and its Orientalist transcribers, a process, which is the reverse of what happened in Europe, took place. For where the Grimms, in their quest for national identity were reworking the German folktale to fit in with the bourgeois values of their time, in the Punjab and elsewhere in India, there was an attempt to de-link all that was worthy or 'noble' in the folktale from the colonial present so that it could be constituted as the white man's civilisational burden. The 'worth' and 'nobility' being appropriated and traced back either to Greece, the cradle of European civilisation, or to ancient Brahminical India, that for the purposes of colonial discourse, was shown as being rudely shattered by the Muslim interregnum. Thus for Swynnerton experiencing the seduction of the storytelling hour in the Punjab plains, "the hero Ranjha piping down the valleys, like Mir Shikari in the legends of Rasalu, or the god Krishna in Hindu mythology,

(were), after all, the Greek Orpheus, or the Teutonic magic fiddler, moving across the stage of historical romance in Indian dress."³⁵

Other than the political dimension of the transition from the oral to the literary tradition to which the differences between the European and the Punjabi folktale may be attributed, it is also necessary to keep in mind that stories are shaped by cultural contexts and narrative forms. The Sleeping Beauties, Snow Whites and Cinderellas of the tales from Grimm and later in the twentieth century as popularised by Disney, are characterised by their passivity. Instead of acting, they are acted upon. After her one act of curiosity in relation to the spindle – and even that is the preordained outcome of the seventh fairy's curse and not conscious action on her part – the Sleeping Beauty sleeps her hundred years sleep until awakened by the prince, Cinderella weeps into the cinders of her father's hearth until reprieve comes in the shape of the fairy godmother and the prince, just as it takes the mandatory arrival of the prince and the accidental jolting of the glass coffin to quicken Snow White to life. In Cinderella's case her goodness consists of uncomplaining patience and her ability to endure the cruel spite of her stepmother and ugly sisters and Snow White is known for her industrious housewifery. Significantly, women who exercise agency are either witches and old hags characterised by unbridled ambition, malice and the unscrupulous use of magic – or if they are young and beautiful, by pride or curiosity leading to the sin of disobedience. Inevitably and not surprisingly, they get their comeuppance: the older witch-women and hags meet with violent ends and the younger ones live to rue their clearly misplaced independence – Bluebeard's wives are a case in point. Perhaps more than any other, the story of Little Red Riding Hood demonstrates that this aspect of European folklore was not part of the folktale's initial design, but a latter day accretion rooted in a Calvinistic worldview with all the negative connotations of curiosity, disobedience and wayward femininity.

As told by the Grimms, Little Red Riding Hood, is based on the prohibition/transgression pattern of the cautionary tale. Red Riding Hood's mother sends her to her grandmother with cakes and wine with the warning "not to stray from the path" as she walks through the wood. Red Riding Hood's failure to do so not only endangers her life but also gives the wolf the chance to devour her grandmother. Saved by the timely intervention of the woodman, Red Riding Hood says to herself, "Never again in all my life will I stray from the path and enter the woods alone, when mother has forbidden it."³⁶ As opposed to this, a peasant version recorded in France at the end of the nineteenth century follows a different trajectory. The Story of the Grandmother contains neither the advice nor the warnings associated with the more 'official' or literary versions. A mother sends her daughter to her grandmother with a loaf of freshly baked bread and a bottle of milk. As there are no instructions to disobey or prohibitions to violate, neither disobedience nor transgression are the issues at stake. Concerned more with entertaining its audience than with moralising, the story is built around a series of incidents including one

*in which the girl takes off her clothes in a manner reminiscent of a striptease, partly because she is unsure of the wolf's identity but mainly to buy time, and finally escapes both him and her role of victim by convincing him to let her go outdoors to relieve herself.*³⁷

Closer in spirit to the pre-Grimmsian women, the heroine of the Punjabi folktale stakes her full claim to agency. Whether it is Fazal Noor who lives life on her own terms and with a ready wit, [Fazal Noor and the Jinn] the farmer's daughter whose quick wits enable her to marry the king and be raised to the level of his guide and mentor [The King and the Four Girls] the blacksmith's daughter [Ghulam Badshah, his Son Gul and the Blacksmith's Daughter] who refuses to suffer violence at the hands of her princely husband, there is no dearth of feisty women in these tales, who despite force of circumstance and patriarchal precedents, are determined to take full part in their own lives. However, the issue of female agency in the Punjabi folktale is not as simple as it seems at first glance, nor, as claimed by Duggal, can it be attributed entirely to the fact that "the Panjabi people ... have had trouble always in store for them. They had to fight many a battle of their own as well as of their neighbours. And this has made the Panjabi woman fearless. She is bold. She asks her lover to carry her along even to the battle field."³⁸

The secret of the Punjabi heroine's strength – and her vulnerability as opposed to her European counterpart – or to put it somewhat differently, the differences between the two, may be traced to the difference in value systems between a syncretic, pre-capitalist agrarian society where family and kin group loyalties claim priority on the one hand, and the very different demands of a puritan ethic and free market economy in the newly emergent nation state on the other. In the latter, the development of the 'separate spheres' ideology of gender roles in concert with notions of European individualism were amalgamated into the literary folktale to meet the needs of a bourgeois readership, with obedience, sexual passivity and sweetness of temper highlighted as positive characteristics for women, especially heroines. Agency and the active pursuit of desire, which were male prerogatives, tended to become negative and even evil when appropriated by women such as crafty stepmothers, jealous queens, ugly sisters, witches and crones.

Drawing upon a different set of values, the world of the Punjabi folktale reflects the centrality of kin group, caste affiliations and family ties. Loyalty to the family or kin group is the hallmark of positive behaviour in women and men rather than unquestioning obedience to impersonal authority or given belief system. Thus Rasalu is prevented from wreaking vengeance on his father by the Pirs and holy men from Makkah who hold back his hand, "forbidding him to harm his father," even though Salwahan was a Hindu and Rasalu newly converted to Islam, until it comes to pass that "father and son become reconciled," [The Revolt of Rasalu] and even the ghouls, setting aside their dietary preferences, load their so-called son-in-law (the princess in male disguise) and apparent husband of their adoptive daughter

with the riches at their disposal before sending off the bridal couple to their new home. [The Princess and the Ghouls] Fidelity in women is prized above pearls across cultures as patriarchal certitudes depend on male control of female sexuality. And yet, as exemplified by Bhaggarbhatth this is the one area where the mechanisms of control are the weakest. In the subcontinent, where the emphasis is heavily on caste purity and lineage, virtue in women – and in women virtue is almost always related to sexual behaviour – takes on a special significance. It is hardly surprising therefore, that when it comes to the exercise of sexual agency and/or disloyalty to the king/husband, the very elastic and accommodating horizons of the wondertale tighten to a noose. This is evidenced in the tragic fates of Luna, Kokilan and Rani Sundran. A Salvahan may wed a girl young enough to be his daughter and Rasalu while away the night with the gardener's wife [Appendix 3] without fear of reprisals, but for the women there is a price to pay.³⁹

So potent is the fear of female sexual agency that the theme of infidelity in women forms a major trope in folk literature regardless of cultural and geographical location. Whether it is the insecurity of King Shahryar, "King of Kings of the Abu Sasan in the islands of India and China, a Lord of armies and guards and servants and dependents,"⁴⁰ that compels Shehrezade to spin out stories for a thousand and one nights to save her own life as well as the lives of the female population of the realm, or Guinevere of Arthurian legend bearing the burden of guilt in a nunnery for the sake of her husband's hurt pride, a woman's claim to agency in sexual matters is not to be smiled at. Thus whether it is in recounting Luna's illicit desire for Puran, or Kokilan's adulterous love for Raja Hodi, the narrative voices, be they of Juma the colonised storyteller or Swynnerton, the civilised and civilising Englishman, take on an elegiac tone and place them beyond the pale of forgiveness. It would appear that this is one area in which the concerns of the wondertale dovetail with those of the social order, were it not for the heterogeneous promiscuity of the genre which opens up alternatives to the very certitudes that it affirms, for illicit sex provides the substance for countless folktales, cuckolds abound and lovers make merry at their expense – but of that, later.

Having escaped the division into binary oppositions that characterises the work of Perrault and the Grimms, the world of Indo-Pakistani/Punjabi wondertale is relatively undifferentiated and certainly androgynous. Male-female roles may be socially allocated but the ways in which sexual identity is negotiated are diverse, deeply nuanced and shot through with ambiguity – "Ho rider of the dark grey mare/Did you forget to bind your hair? Like some girl's all loosely tied/It flies about from side to side," teases Rasalu's betrothed as he comes riding by [The Revolt of Rasalu]. Conversely, on encountering Rani Saunkhni and her maidens, Rasalu, "pleasantly surprised to see such goodly company, ... (stops) them and (asks), 'who are you and where are you going? You are dressed as men but you walk like women!'" [Raja Rasalu, Rani Saunkhni and the Goldsmith's Son]. Cross-dressing is integral to the plot and narrative action in many of the stories in

this collection; the blacksmith's daughter [Ghulam Badshah, his Son Gul and the Blacksmith's Daughter], the princess [The Princess and the Ghouls] and the merchant's daughter [The Story of Prince Sabar] dress as men in the pursuit of their desire. In itself there is nothing remarkable in this, as masquerade and disguise are stocks-in-trade of the wondertale, and the fact that these women need to dress as men a reminder, that regardless of the freedoms allowed by the fantastic, dangers lurk at every corner for a woman alone journeying across patriarchal terrains. What makes this assumption of the male persona noteworthy, are the comments and asides that accompany them – "So (the blacksmith's daughter) disguised herself as a young nobleman, and very handsome she looked in her new attire," or "and then (the princess) looked like a noble young prince, both valiant and strong." With the exception of the merchant's daughter, and in her case it is the magical bird Bhangami who sees through her disguise as a dervish – not only are these women accepted in their male guise, they take on male attributes and are offered the hands of fair maidens in marriage returning home at the end of the quest with brides in tow.

While it is clear that anything and everything is possible in the wondertale, it is necessary to remember that if at one level this recourse to male disguise and androgyny may be the stuff of fantasy, at another it is located in the 'real,' for it is equally true that in the subcontinent, as in other cultures and regions, the notion of women in male guise and their assumption of male roles was not an alien concept – Razia Sultana of Delhi, named as the heir to the Delhi Sultanate by her father the Sultan Altamish, and the Rani of Jhansi in male dress dealing with matters of the state and leading their armies into battle are two names that come immediately to mind, as do those of the Sufi poets of the Punjab, who occupy the other end of the socio-political spectrum, such as Bulleh Shah dressed as a woman and dancing to placate his pir.⁴¹ Nor is he alone in this stance – the Sufic tradition entails the feminisation of the desiring subject in her/his quest for the ineffable Beloved.

The discursive ambiguities of the wondertale's landscape are not limited to gender identity alone but inform other areas as well, the most significant in this regard being the oppositional hero-villain dyad. If the interchangeability of gender identity opens up spaces for 'dreaming alternatives,' the blurring of difference between heroes and villains enables a more compassionate understanding of the nuanced complexities of the human predicament. The most telling instance of this interchangeability is exemplified by Thirya's slide from man-eating ogre to victim. Injured and bleeding, witness to the destruction of his brothers and the passing away of his familiar world, Thirya cries out his bewilderment and pain: "You have cut off my arm and killed my brothers. Why still pursue me?" and later, "O God, you alone are my saviour! He won't let me alone!" It is at this moment that Thirya, entirely human in his anguish, ceases to be the villain that he was to begin with, and touches a sympathetic chord in the reader/listener – just as at the same time, Rasalu in his single-minded pursuit to destroy the giants, relinquishes his

humanity to become 'more than a man' as implacable avenger and inexorable fate [Rasalu and the Rakshasas of Gandgarh]. While these examples draw attention to a fluidity that blurs categorical distinctions in the folktale, textual evidence also reveals a close and critical link between narrative form and gender-roles. For while it is true that the folk or wondertale is an amalgam of different narrative forms, the thrust of a given tale, its inner logic and even the sequence of events that grant it meaning are shaped by the dominant narrative form, and the fate of heroines and heroes depends very much on the genre in which they are inscribed. Not all adulterous princesses meet tragic ends, nor do all villains, whether giants or humans, elicit sympathy at the moment of their downfall. Stories that are formally closest to the vaar or epic and high romance, such as the Rasalu legends are more likely to take on a tragic dimension as compared to those in which the dominant strain belongs to the magical romance and the comic tale.

This is not surprising as both vaar and high romance express the 'aristocratic' line in literature; their heroes, like Salvahan, Ra-alu and Puran were often local chiefs and rajas and the substance of these tales is woven around "tournaments, battles, violence and treachery."⁴² Belonging to the epic genre the 'vaar' has its etymological roots in the Sanskrit 'vart', which means usage, expression, description, statement as well as time, place and history. Its meaning is best illustrated by language-use and idiomatic turns of phrase as in 'ajj Mughlan di vaar ae' (now it is the time or 'turn' of the Mughals) or 'ay Bhagat Singh di Vaar ae' (this is the epic of Bhagat Singh) As such, even within the magic circle of the wondertale, it represents a predominantly masculinist strain and espouses established truths. Bound by the exigencies of time, class, gender and status, circumscribed by its own particular code of honour, and couched in the language of valour and prowess on the battlefield, its heroes and heroines must ultimately submit to the genre's formal demands. Salvahan and Rasalu must uphold the 'honour' of king's and rulers even as they succumb to the pitfalls of their illusory power, and trapped in their role as queens and balked at every step, Luna and Kokilan can only betray. Within the purview of the folktale, therefore, the epic strain's power to engage lies in the dramatic tension created by the oppositional pull between the magical dimension where the impossible is made real and the hierarchies and self-seriousness of a 'heroic' world that pose a constant threat to it.

Unburdened by the epic dimensions of the vaar, the same themes of love and transgression take on different meanings in the magical romance. Thus if in the Rasalu legend, Luna has no recourse but to succumb to the poison of unrequited love in an unequal marriage [The Story of Puran Bhagat], just as the vizier's daughter must suffer public humiliation for daring to laugh at Rasalu in a public space [The Revolt of Rasalu], in the magical romance, the fate of the blacksmith's daughter for a similar challenge to masculine pride is very different. Prince Gul marries her so that he may punish her for her transgression, but ends up providing her with the opportunity to establish her dominance over him [Ghulam Badshah,

his Son Gul and the Blacksmith's Daughter]. It would seem that the very contempt with which society views women in 'real' life is subverted in the magical romance that opens up opportunities for them to exercise their wit and demonstrate their capabilities.

If the epic and magical romance can deploy the fantastic to build a desired and desirable world where the certitudes and fixities of the real world become elastic, the comic tale uses it in ways that turn them inside out. Laughter is inherently anti-authority, and the comic tale, with its roots in the carnivalesque⁴³ and also in the carnival or mela,⁴⁴ is bound up with peoples' unofficial truths as opposed to the verities of the ruling classes. The larger than life heroes and heroines of the epical strain and the self-absorbed lovers of the magical romance recede into the background in the comic tale. Instead of Rasalu on his dark grey mare vanquishing giants and winning plaudits, there is Eesera making away with the fraudulently acquired gold as fast as his ass can carry him [Eesara and Caneesara], and the image of Fazal Noor, irritably breaking the empty pot on her husband's head for demanding more food when he knows there is none, replaces those of the Kokilans and Lunas and other princesses, both foolish and wise. Here heroes turn into lawless clowns, and heroines, relinquishing the luxuries of the palace bower, turn wily and trap kings into admitting they lie [The King and the Four Girls].

In the comic tale the spotlight is on ordinary people – on the "old wife and the bard" and "the bhat, the mirasi, the bharain, the jogi, the faqir and all that ilk." Looking down from the heights conferred by status and class, the uncompromising eye of authority may see them only as a "sorry set of drunkards," but on this terrain where differences of caste and class along with the taboos and prohibitions that maintain these distinctions are erased, nobody escapes the irreverent all inclusive spontaneity of people's laughter which refuses to spare even those who laugh – whether the humour is parodic and deadpan as an awe-struck multitude watches the depredations of the Lumbardar whose "wisdom is in everyone's mouth" [The Sagacious Lumbardar], or expressed in the open enjoyment of the absurd when a whole family of weavers lament the death of a child yet to be conceived by a maiden yet to be wed [The Silly Weaver Girl].

There is no room for any dogma in the comic tale. But this seeming unconcern with all things serious cannot be taken at face value. Imbued in the carnivalesque spirit, the laughter of the comic tale represents what Bakhtin, in writing about the carnival and rituals of festivity in medieval Europe, calls "the gay and free laughing aspect of the world, with its unfinished open character, with the joy of change and renewal."⁴⁵ And it is precisely in this joyous open-ended view of the world that the transformative power of the comic tale – and of people's laughter – is to be found. Instead of affirming the triumph of truths already established,⁴⁶ it replaces them with uncertainty and in so doing opens up spaces where though the truth may not be found, what claims to be true may be questioned and tested. Clearly there is no

room here for the heroics and grand betrayals of the epic world. Transferred to its terrain, relieved of their heroic stature, the heroes and heroines of the epic worlds lose their tragic integrity. What is revealed instead is the hypocrisy and double standards of those in power. Seen from 'below' Salwahan emerges as a mere cuckold – a ridiculous figure recalling the stereotype of an old man trying to control a wife young enough to be his daughter. Transformed into a parodic gesture, Luna's pursuit of Puran who does not want her mirrors Salwahan's desire for a woman who is with him only because she cannot be elsewhere. The king upholding his dwindling virility is no different from the lust-crazed woman chasing a reluctant lover. Faced with these images, which so clearly belong to the realm of the joke, the grand patriarchal discourse of betrayal and punishment dissolves and becomes insubstantial. Stripped of their heroic dimension, Salwahan and Luna lose their destructive power and are brought down to the same plane as the young weaver going hungry in an attempt to impress his future in-laws with the refinement of his manners [The Weaver and the Priest] and the wily Eesara and his friend the equally wily Caneesara attempting to defraud each other with the greatest of good humour and understanding [Eesara and Caneesara]. Brought face to face with the all-inclusive irreverence of laughter, official morality loses its edge as well as its punitive power. What needs to be remembered, however, is that this is not the simple merriment of a holiday mood, but philosophical laughter that exposes and destroys the hypocrisies and hollowness of old, official morality and clears the way for renewal and change, and in the process redefines and articulates the boundaries of the permissible and the impermissible.

Though the epic, the romantic and the comic are separate genres, in the folktale, their boundaries are fluid and enable a blending of their different characteristics so that elements of the one are interwoven with the other. But while the epic strain often shares a similar worldview and merges with that of the romantic tale, it is the presence of the comic genre, of people's laughter – of a world seen from below, that grants a double vision to these tales to reveal the countless untold stories that lie coiled in the heart of stories that are told. Heroic gestures, kingly pomp and circumstance and the blandishments of romance may enchant us, but these bright-hued seductive images mask grim realities. Rasalu may do everything to ensure that he and Kokilan will 'live happily ever after' in their high citadel at Kharimurti, but lurking at the edges of this idyllic world is the knowledge that this is not the way it will always remain – for the citadel is built on uncertain foundations, and time moves on and always already the unknown stranger waits in the wings for his cue [Rani Kokilan and Raja Rasalu]. If the heroes of romance have the power to rule and change the lives of others, it is the unvarnished vision of the dhobi's wife that cuts through the haze of romantic illusion to reveal the tragedy of the princess in her bower, whether it is Luna or Kokilan, or even the prince or raja who is no less a prisoner to the structures and trappings of the power he wields.

What folk and fairytales create is a desired or desirable world. Their impact lies in

their symbolic depiction of social realities imaginatively apprehended. Originally part of communal property, the folk or wondertale embodied people's lived experience of the scarcities and prohibitions that regulate everyday life as well as their visions of desired plenitude. This perhaps is why though romance and glory may lie with the rajas and ranis, when all is said and done, the vitality and verve that give piquancy to the tales are to be found in the voices of the disempowered, the weak and marginalized such as women, younger sons, children, simpletons, cross dressers, buffoons as well as members of the lower castes viz the weavers, tanners, blacksmiths, mirasis, bhands and "all that ilk." It is after all the lowly jackal who quite literally nudges the mighty Raja Bhoj into 'seeing' how poorly he has adjudicated between the wily crow and the swans [Raja Rasalu and the Swans] and the blacksmith's daughter in partnership with the despised rat, who saves her royal husband from life as a groom, and exposes the pretentious smugness of a prince and ministers of state, as well as the subterfuge of the dumb princess.

But stories are being written and rewritten all the time, thus if countless tellings have frozen Luna and Puran in the oppositional dyad of infatuated stepmother and the morally upright and loyal son, another telling in another time and another genre has broken the centuries-old spell and released them into another life. Almost a hundred years after Steel, Temple and Swynnerton sat in the verandas of various dak-bungalows where "the stars twinkle overhead and the mosquito sings through the hot air,"⁴⁷ listening to the varied voices of Sharaf and Juma and other unnamed bards, as their munshis transcribed Punjabi tales into Urdu so they could be rewritten in English, Shiv Kumar of Batala rewrote Luna's story. In the process he released her from the constraints of the stereotype that reduced her to only one aspect of her being, to reveal the story within the story of the hopelessness and pain of a girl trapped in marriage to a man old enough to be her father:

Every hour
The serpent of fiery moments
Dances in the inner cells of my soul
And the demon of fear haunts me
I sit and spin the wheel of time
I spin the rays of the sun,
And wind them into a rope
And hang this rope
From the roof of my years
And every day I die
With this multicoloured noose around my neck
And yet I die not.

This shift in meaning is endorsed by Puran's changed perception as he accepts and transforms his death into a moment of protest because he recognises Luna's pain and the scandal of her life as his father's child bride:

Slice away my limbs
So that no Salwahan in future,
No father in future
Shares the youth of his daughter.⁴⁸

In today's globalised world riven by greed-driven wars, we are witness to and inscribed in another form of storytelling, where difference is demonised and dreams monitored; where only the things that can be bought have value and where the peoples' 'right to choose' is debased and reduced to a choice of brand names – 'is it to be Colgate or Forhans? A Nike or Reebok?' Now, more than ever, it is time to reclaim and rediscover the magic of the wondertale. Not because it is a rich heritage that we need to conserve – as yet another object in the consumerist fair – but because we dare not lose it. Folk and fairytales build a second life and a second world outside officialdom. On their terrain the accepted hierarchies of the strong and weak, the mighty and the meek, the human and animal, the feminine and masculine are often reversed or subverted to shed a new light on the relations of women and men and between those who have power and those who do not. An imaginative apprehension of the known and knowable world in which the boundaries of the permissible and the impermissible are charted out, these stories are endowed with the potential to "open up spaces for dreaming alternatives." If we are to counter the dehumanising influences of modern consumerism and resist the lure of its goblin fruit, we need to stake a claim to agency and rewrite our own stories. It is not an impossible task, for stories are being written and rewritten all the time. But in order to do so, we must borrow some of the folktale's magic; to open our minds and hearts to the whisper of numberless voices that fill the air around us, waiting to be heard, and to rediscover in ourselves, our lost ability to imagine other, kinder more tolerant worlds. The foremost aim of the folktale is to entertain – to give pleasure to the listening circle. We have only to accept this offer and pay heed to the storyteller's voice – "Listen," it says, "this is how it was before, but things could change – and they might."⁴⁹

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Lahore, 2007

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Captain R.C. Temple, 1981. *The Legends of the Panjab*, Vol. I, 1884. Lahore: (rpt.) Allied Press, The Mall, Preface, p.vi.
- ² Ibid. p.vii.
- ³ Ibid. p.x.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Edward B. Eastwick, F.R.S., M.R.A.S., of Merton College Oxford: Member of the Asiatic Societies of Paris and Bombay; and Professor of Urdu, and Librarian, in the East India College at Haileybury, 1851. *The Bagh o Bahar or, The Garden and the Spring: Being the Adventures of King Azad Bakht and the Four Darweshes: Literally translated from the Urdu of Mir Amman of Dihli*. Hertford: Printed and Published by Stephen Austin, Bookseller to the East India College, p.viii. Made with reference to the English translation of Mir Amman's Urdu version of *The Bagh o Bahar*, this comment can be applied equally to the motivating impulse of the British folklorists engaged in recording and compiling the folk tales of the Punjab. This sentence sheds an interesting light on the strategies of ruling employed by the British in India, especially when taken in conjunction with the next sentence: "Though the work ... was written five centuries ago, such is the stereotypical character of Orientals, that it affords even at this day a most vivid picture of Eastern life."
- ⁶ Kartar Singh Duggal, 2002. 'Introduction' in R.C. Temple, *The Legends of the Panjab*, Vol I. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., p.vii.
- ⁷ Marina Warner, 1995. *From the Beast to the Blonde*. United Kingdom: Vintage, p.xvi.
- ⁸ Ibid. p.xvii.
- ⁹ Different verse and narrative forms from the folk tradition of the Punjab.
- ¹⁰ This phrase has been borrowed from Bakhtin who uses it with reference to the carnival. Mikhail Bakhtin, 1968. *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The M.I.T. Press, p.9.
- ¹¹ Vladimir Propp, 1979. *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, 2nd ed. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, chaps. 3-5.
- ¹² Ibid. p.39.
- ¹³ Rev. Charles Swynnerton, 1976. 'Introduction' in *Romantic Tales of the Punjab*. Lahore: (rpt.) Quasain.
- ¹⁴ Warner, p.xvii.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Jack Zipes, 1989 with reference to the religious training of Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm. *The Brothers Grimm – From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*. New York, London: Routledge, p.2.
- ¹⁷ Ibid. pp.12-13. Zipes argues that Wilhelm often changed the original texts by comparing them to variants acquired by him and Jacob, and though he tried to retain the essential message of each tale, "he tended to make the narratives more proper and prudent for bourgeois audiences."
- ¹⁸ Temple, p.xi.
- ¹⁹ Ibid. p.vii
- ²⁰ Ibid. p.xi.
- ²¹ Baba Inayat had worked as domestic help in an upper middleclass home in Lahore. Though based in Lahore, his employers belonged to a landowning family of Kasur. This background, which formed the basis of Baba Inayat's connection with his employers, also defined his relationship with them and had familiarised him with the upper class lifestyles, manners and language-use comprising Punjabi mixed with English and Urdu words.

- ²² This is not to argue that this was the first or only time that the Punjabi folktale transited from the oral to the written tradition, but merely to identify a particular moment in its history.
- ²³ Jack Zipes (1989), p.18.
- ²⁴ Ibid. p.12.
- ²⁵ Ibid. p.13.
- ²⁶ Ibid. pp.13-14.
- ²⁷ Ibid. p.13.
- ²⁸ Ibid. p.13.
- ²⁹ Jack Zipes, 1992. *Breaking the Magic Spell – Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, New York: Routledge, p.6.
- ³⁰ Jack Zipes, trans. and introduced, 1992. *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*. USA: Bantam Books.
- ³¹ Ibid. p.182.
- ³² Warner, p.xvii.
- ³³ Edward Said used this psychoanalytical term to show how European discourses on the 'Orient' constructed an Other that enabled the construction of Europe's own identity. This idea of 'othering' has less to do with the other than with the needs and insecurities of the self, which are projected on to the Other.
- ³⁴ Zipes (1989), pp.38-40.
- ³⁵ Swynnerton (1976).
- ³⁶ Zipes, *The Complete Fairytales* (1992), pp.101-5.
- ³⁷ Jack Zipes, 1984. *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*. USA: Bergin and Garvey Publications, pp.5-6.
- ³⁸ Kartar Singh Duggal, p.viii.
- ³⁹ The emphasis on marital fidelity to which even the alternative world of the wondertale gives way highlights the crucial importance of caste purity in the subcontinent. More latitude is allowed outside the charmed circle of the conjugal unit as exemplified by Rasalu's intervention that enables his betrothed, the Rani Saunkhni to marry her lover, the goldsmith's son. [*Raja Rasalu, Rani Saunkhni and the Goldsmith's Son*]
- ⁴⁰ Richard F. Burton (undated). *The Arabian Nights*. London: Blue Ribbon Books, 90 Gt. Russell Street, p.2.
- ⁴¹ Bulleh Shah, Sufi poet of the Punjab.
- ⁴² I. Serebryakov, 1975. *Punjabi Literature: a brief outline*. Lahore: Progressive Books, Urdu Bazaar (First Pakistani edition), pp.18-19.
- ⁴³ Carnavalesque: as used by the Russian formalist Bakhtin, the term does not signify the actual festival but an idea concerning the invocation of laughter linked to the overturning of authority. In this sense it is people's laughter that has never merged with the official culture of the rulers or the ruling classes.
- ⁴⁴ The carnival of medieval Europe like the mela or urs, which is still part of a living tradition in the Punjab and other parts of the subcontinent, denotes a temporary freedom from the prohibitions and taboos of class, caste, and sexual difference.
- ⁴⁵ Bakhtin, p.83.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid. p.9.
- ⁴⁷ Flora Annie Steel (1973). *Tales of the Punjab*. London: The Bodley Head, p.6.
- ⁴⁸ Shiv Kumar, 1992. English translation of the original Punjabi of Luna as cited in Sant Singh Sekhon and Kartar Singh Duggal, *A History of the Punjab*. Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, pp.202-203.
- ⁴⁹ Warner, p.xvii.

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Nations and narrations – a note

The collection of stories reprinted in this volume is primarily the work of a few British administrators of India in the second half of the nineteenth century and this re-visit may be considered a historical reprint. Although the early administrators did not speak the Indian languages, or even follow them very far, the stories were collected with the help of local interpreters and munshis, the accountants trained to record the testimonies of multiple 'native informants', people who were summoned from the village to the quarters of the administrator – the verandah interview method, as anthropologists have called it. How close they are to the original in the vernacular becomes a secondary concern since this was the first detailed literary documentation of the oral tradition of singing and performing the stories.

In some ways, folklore was part of the picturesque that the British constructed of India as a society of illiterates to whom they brought education. Orality thus became the stigma of Indian society, and was equated with ignorance and seen as the repository of all superstition and reprehensible customary practices. For instance, the practices of sati and child marriage were put on the itinerary of all European travellers to nineteenth century India to convince them of the evils of illiteracy. Meanwhile, elaborately illustrated manuscripts of the history of kings existed along side sacred texts that were, undoubtedly, the privilege of the courtiers and the priestly class.

As such, the task of collecting folklore was to provide insights into the workings of the 'native' mind. Certainly, folkloring as a part of ethnography, the scientific method of studying an unknown peoples, had no precedent prior to India. The printed folklore then became one of the principal sites to identify Indian cultures as oral, pre-literate, and romantic – defined against the rationalist and literary imagination of the British rulers.

Interestingly, before the twentieth century, there is no Indian word for 'folklore', a term that, like anthropology, was part of the cultural project of colonialism. Several of the first British administrators were orientalist scholars particularly interested in documenting India's ancient past, what Bernard Cohn calls "the drive to archeology",¹ the age when the census, the map, and the museum were used to quantify and construct 'ancient' India as a place that was frozen in time, all things of value now being in decline. And decline, in effect, was a leitmotif defining India, one that seems to have influenced the thinking of later scholars of western modernity such as Karl Marx who believed India lived in something he called 'pre-history'.²

Undoubtedly, this was part of the late eighteenth century Romanticism of valorising primal oral culture, something unspoilt by the emerging industrialisation of European cities. Inspired by William Jones and William Morris, these orientalists stressed the similarity between Indians and Britons, playing up the Aryan origins of Buddhists and Brahmins. Simultaneously, they stressed how India was the

childhood of Europe, and infantilised its people and their literary production.

The British administrators who collected and printed folklore came from a history of such legends being tied to a nascent nationalism in Europe. There were three commonalities between this history and colonial India: cultural subjugation, an ancient linguistic tradition, and claims to 'purity'. Some of the earliest proponents include the German poet Herder and the two German brothers, Grimm, who looked for the Volk to construct a national identity that was threatened by invaders, in their case, the French. The nationalist tale in Ireland and the historical novel in Scotland served a similar purpose in nineteenth century Europe, where a separatist nationhood was imagined in response to England's hegemonic designs.

But in India, folklore and the concept of nationhood did not concur in quite the same way since there were other sources from which to imagine identity, for instance, through ancient scriptures, racial roots, and linguistic history. Indian folklore was decidedly non-Brahminical and non-hierarchical, even as the British folklorists valorised the Brahmin and the Buddhist especially in the Punjab which was primarily Muslim and Sikh.

THE "EMPIRE" THEORY OF FOLKLORE

Some of the earliest precursors of collections of folktales in India began with *Indian Antiquary*, a journal established by James Burgess in Bombay in 1872 to cover "Manners and Customs, Arts, Mythology, Feasts, Festivals, Rites, Antiquities and History" which reads like a contemporaneous definition of folklore in Europe.

Another source of folklore research was the Folklore Society of London founded in 1878 whose journal *Folk-lore* did not have a readership in India but was filled with disciplined research about Indian material culture. Stuart Blackburn writes, "Looking through the large and loosely and closely printed pages of the early issues of the journal, one finds not hundreds but literally thousands of entries, some very brief others several pages long, of folklore collectanea, such as proverbs from Sindh, snake worship in Bengal, and charms and spells in Madras. With a few notable exceptions, the contributors were Europeans, mostly British civil servants and missionaries, but the journal did put folklore into the public domain in India."³

Blackburn argues that, "The Presidential Speech to the Folklore Society in 1900, advocated the 'empire theory' of folklore, according to which an awareness of native lore was helpful to an efficient administration of the colonies, and three years later, the Linguistic Survey of India was established with Sir George Grierson, a veteran folklorist-administrator, in charge."⁴

Among the contributors to the journal were the two main research scholars in India, William Crooke and R. C. Temple. Crooke who wrote and edited several volumes of books, served as president of the Folklore Society from 1912-1913 and

his most influential text is known as *An Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (1894). R.C. Temple was born in India in 1850 and studied at Cambridge before returning to India where he held several military and civil appointments. Temple contributed to the method and theory of folklore collection and is best known for his three-volume *Legends of the Panjab* (1884-1900). Later, he became head of the Folklore Society. Both men also started and edited folklore journals whilst in India.

With great, sometimes unnecessary attention to detail, orientalist scholars like R.C. Temple, Flora Annie Steel⁵ and Charles Swynnerton, in the main, collected popular stories in the Punjab in an attempt to document the Indian imagination. In this collation, they also appropriated and sanitised the bardic tales that were improbable legends and indecent tales often with a mystical twist to them, laced with a wit and a wisdom that was often lost on the Europeans. It can only be surmised that much context was lost in translation, and hints of the underpinnings of the Rasalu tale in history and in spiritual lore may be glimpsed in part, for instance, in the reference to Khwaja Khizr and Guru Gorakh Nath as regenerative presences.

Even as R.C. Temple refers to the "poverty of the rustic imagination," his ardent interest in quantifying and documenting this literature comes through. He speaks of those he interviews – the jogis, fakirs, mirasis, the bhat and the bharain – as "a sorry set of drunkards," but apologises at the end of his preface to *The Legends of the Panjab* that "so much prominence has been given to the stories of saints and holy personages because it is really by a careful study of such things that we can hope to grasp the religious and superstitious ideas that dominate the bulk of the Indian populations."⁶

Both R.C. Temple and Swynnerton make long references to the glorious Aryan past of the Upper Indus when the Greeks and Scythians ruled the land, much before the "Muhammadan eruption changed the whole face of the country and annihilated all the existing conditions of society,"

In Swynnerton's words:⁷ "The Upper Punjab is now but sparsely populated by tribes and families rude and poor, but in former times it was the home of peoples who flourished in numbers, and who had wealth and resources in abundance. Nor were the inhabitants ignorant and boorish then as they are now, but, on the contrary, they were advanced equally with the rest of India in letters, the sciences, and the arts. Traces of that vanished civilization are still to be seen in the surviving fragments of their literatures, in their coins, their desecrated temples and their ruined tombs."⁸

Swynnerton makes much comparison between the Rasalu folktale and the Old Testament and to Greek sources such as Herodotus, Aeschylus, Aesop and Homer. He believes the text incorporates some of the trials of the heroes in the Mahabharata that is now overlain with Muhammadan iconography.

But just as much epic legend as ancient history, the Rasalu tale points to many clues such as the hero's itinerary, places located in present day Pakistan. Swynnerton dates the tales to 800 A.D., with 'Rasalu' being not a personal name but referring to the prince of the Syal tribes of Sialkot. The legendary well where his half brother, Puran, was incarcerated for years still exists in the city, and one of the totem pillars of Tillah Jogian is housed in the Lahore Museum, set up by John Lockwood Kipling.

THE ARGUMENT AGAINST ORALITY

Why folk tales were classed as neither history nor literature, although there was ample archeological evidence to make a case for the former since performance is part of the narration, or why folktales were not considered a part of the indigenous knowledge system, remains to be investigated. One reason for this may be that by relegating the romantic ballads, heroic epics, legends, animal allegories, jokes and proverbs to the realm of the oral, they were illegitimated and thereby condemned as not-quite-knowledge.

As new research has argued, all oral accounts need not be predicated on a primal 'oral tradition' since these cultures were not necessarily pre-literate. There was a parallel existence of courtiers and scribes who committed legend or verse to text. According to this research, folklore never existed as part of some pre-historical cultural formation of which nothing is known, but only as printed folktales interspersed with verse.

Writing was considered a minor administrative function assigned to official scribes. Even though paper had come to India by the thirteenth century as part of the Persian-Turkish cultural expansion, it was not until the sixteenth century and the invention of the printing press that this revolution overtook India and was employed in the imperial cultural project. Regarding folk verse and tales, a lot of old material was committed to print and thus canonised, while the interpretations and interpellations gradually died out.

Colonial historians like Benedict Anderson go so far as to contend that the modern nation-state is predicated on the technology of control that the invention of the printing press made possible. 'Print capitalism', as he calls it, operated through the textbooks of public education system and in the publishing of vernacular grammars. While it may be true that print capitalism colonised Indian languages by standardising and thus fixing grammar and spelling, it also conferred status on the linguistic register over others and established a literary canon.

Print capitalism is almost synonymous with the introduction of public education to India which earlier relied on the karkhana (workshop) and the gharana (family profession) for the transmission of knowledge through a strict procedure of apprenticeship, or more generally through the madrassa and dharamshala. This

applied to all manner of learning – architecture, music, medicine, or metallurgy, to take a random view – that was based on repeated empirical observation and on making studies or copies.

But as empire expanded, particularly in the case of India, which was the largest and most important colony to the British, power was consolidated not through brute force alone but by epistemological intervention. Defining, classifying, and documenting the native, established the theatre of power. First came the procedures of land settlement and the registration of property, then the census that counted and classified the population, languages and scripts were standardised, and a code of law was established to regulate what the rulers considered was legal, moral, and legitimate behaviour. Public education became the crucible in which to 'civilise' the natives and to inculcate values that the British considered modern and productive. Through missionary schools, a class of people was created who would rule India for the British.

Here, the distinction between oral and literate cultures was made sharper, establishing the false binary between local, oral 'tradition' and colonial literate 'modernity' that continues to haunt all debate on culture to this day. Folklore was caught in the crossfire, alternately valorised as representing the popular consciousness and condemned for being vulgar.

THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

The Oedipal allegory of the son defying his father, the king, repeats itself in the tale of Puran who walks away into exile from his father's kingdom. Thrown at the bottom of the well with his limbs severed, Puran is retrieved several years later by a saint and sage whose path Puran follows as a mendicant. Puran's suffering and exile have more to do with the importance of defying imperial authority and material pleasure for a spiritual journey.

While Puran veers towards the tragic, his half-brother, Rasalu, is not as regressive in temperament and challenges the king for which reason he, too, suffers the fate of an outcast. Rasalu is larger hearted and the stories often begin with how he "journeys at his ease" through riverine forests with his constant companions, his horse, Fauladi, and Shadi, the parrot, to chance upon many encounters with fear and death.

While British commentators tend to see them largely as humorous tales, even the rough translations cannot hide the fact of multiple meanings. For instance, in the hundred or so lines of verse to be found in these texts, an example being:

Sada na phulan torian, nafra, sada na sawan hoe
Sada na joban thir rahe, sada na jeewe koe
Sada na rajian hakimi, sada na rajian des
Sada na howe ghar apna, nafra, bhath pia pardes

Which is translated as:

*The gourd does not always flower, my friend, the monsoon draws to a close
Youth does not last long, my friend, and no one lives forever,
Kings are not always rulers, kings do not always have a country,
One's home is not always one's own, my friend, trouble comes to one in
strange lands.*

[Raja Rasalu and the Affat]

But despite the rigours of exile, prince Rasalu never loses his demeanour and recalls in another allegory:

*Mittha khada i mewa, hansa, thandi rahi chhan
Baldi agg bujhe wekhin, jo Rabb sune meri ban*

*I too have eaten fruit, friend swan, I too have known cool shade,
You will see the burning fire quenched, to God I make my prayer.*

[Raja Rasalu and the Affat]

R.C. Temple rates the verse much higher than its degradation into folk tale, which may also be a problem of the sources and the translators. He writes in his Preface to the Legends, "The folktale is always quaint, interesting, and pretty, for that is why it has been remembered, and did it not possess these qualities, children and rustics would rapidly cease to retain it..."⁹ He believed that the breakdown of the bardic tradition, to which he attached greater literary value, into the 'ordinary folktale' resulted in folktales like that of Raja Rasalu.

But even in their present form, the tales are not simply moral and lack a definitive closure, where justice does not always triumph in the face of human hubris and inequity, or wisdom come from experience. In this, they come very close to literature with the possibility of multiple readings and experiential interpretation, and the ability to travel across cultures and histories.

GENDER AS THE CONTESTED SITE OF POWER

Rasalu leaves home, his friends leave him, and he dismisses his retinue, forsaking many women who claim love for him. He even changes religion to walk into unknown territory all on his own. And yet, the exile is a kind man, whose heart is often "moved within him" as it says in the tales, to help those in danger or in need, in all the animal allegories.

It is only when it comes to the women in these tales – whether queen mothers, sisters, other men's wives or paramours, or the beloved of the protagonist – that Rasalu's heart closes on itself. To be sure, there is much misogyny here; with the women caricatured as lustful transgressors of the bonds of relationship, infidel to the last. Their intelligence is the cunning to survive in their villainy and to beguile the men, their love being no more than the drive for self-preservation.

Thus the Raja repeatedly humiliates and abandons the women who cross his life, but it is the beloved child-wife Kokilan, whose betrayal finally breaks his heart killing the goodness in him, that leads to the tragic denouement. In detailing the sexual politics of its time and in the bawdy retelling of the tale, *The Romance of Raja Rasalu and Other Tales* is evidence again that folktales are not a genre of storytelling whose audience is children.

In this, the tales echo the ancient and modern construction of women's insatiable carnality and venality as the challenge to masculinity and the social order. Exploring Rasalu's relations with women may require another discourse analysis because, even for their times, the tales are distinctly stilted in their representation of the female characters.

And yet, this stilted profiling of women is not surprising and may often not even be noticed because it is in keeping with the earlier traditions of storytelling. The quintessential oral tale of a wily woman, Scheherazade, in *The Thousand and One Nights* uses her mind in concocting tales of lust and vengeance to purge the king of his anger against women and his blood lust and survive another day.

The meaning of *The Thousand and One Nights* remains elusive but as sociologist Edward Said argues, it has coloured the imagination of the West forever in how it sees Middle Eastern Muslim cultures as erotic fantasy, where it has become difficult to imagine the harem simply as the women's quarters and not as a king's concubinage.¹⁰ In a fascinating study of the philosophy of humanism that ran parallel to the English conquest of large parts of the world, Robert Young writes how this was often an excuse for barbaric murder and the pillage of foreign lands for plain profit. The putative responsibility of humanism to civilise the savage in other cultures was couched in all manner of generalities and abstractions, for instance, by the likes of James Mill who wrote *The History of India* to secure a place in the East India Company without setting foot on the land. In the larger humanist enterprise, argues Young, issues of disparity regarding gender, like race, were conveniently ignored.¹¹

The Romance of Raja Rasalu and Other Tales may be read in one of several overlapping ways: as enchanting fables, painstakingly collected documentation of vernacular text, or as part of colonial orientalism. It is important, as Edward Said stresses, not to share the assumptions of orientalism, the racialising procedure according to which the Orient was an ahistorical construct that conveniently elided the imperial political and economic condition. Folklore was another attempt by British administrators, travellers, and pilgrims to construct 'picturesque' India through the essentialising gaze fixing the "infantile consciousness of the rustic"¹² as the destiny of the region. Folklore was thus instrumental ethnographic knowledge used to justify administrative excesses against the natives.

As Said has contested in *Orientalism*, revisiting colonial ethnography or folklore

studies is not only important for former colonised peoples. Since the 'Orient' is the place of Europe's oldest and richest colonies, the source of its civilisation and languages, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other, it has helped define the contrasting image, idea, and experience of Europe. It is of immense importance for the political future of the world, for the inverted images to recognise how they are linked to one another.

Samina Choonara
Lahore, 2007

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Bernard Cohn, 1997. *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, Delhi: Oxford University Press. See Introduction.
- ² Marx and Engels, 1972. *On Colonialism, Articles from 'The New York Tribune' and other Writings*, New York: International Publishers, p.339.
- ³ Stuart Blackburn, 2003. *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, p.13.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ F.A. Steel was an Englishwoman who came to India in 1867 with her husband, a member of the Indian Civil Service, and lived there for twenty-two years. She served individually in the capacity of inspector of a local girls' school. Steel learnt the vernacular and mixed well with the Indians, keeping herself informed of local traditions of art and architecture. Although she collected forty-three tales from the oral versions of local storytellers, Flora Annie Steel is remembered for her remark: 'to get to the truth in India, one should have nine lives like a cat'. Reprinted in Flora Annie Steel (1973). *Tales from the Punjab*. London: The Bodley Head.
- ⁶ R. C. Temple, 1974. 'Preface' in *The Legends of the Panjab*, Vol. I, Islamabad: Institute of Folk Heritage, p.x.
- ⁷ Rev. Charles Swynnerton, 1976. 'Introduction' in *Romantic Tales of the Punjab*. Lahore: (rpt.) Quasain., pp.xvi-xivi.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Temple, p.vi.
- ¹⁰ See Fatima Mernissi, 2001. *Scheherazade Goes West, Different Cultures, Different Harems*, New York: Washington Square Press.
- ¹¹ Robert Young, 1990. *White Mythologies, Writing History and the West*, London: Routledge, pp.4-6.
- ¹² Edward Said, 1979. *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage. See 'Introduction,' pp.1-28.

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Note on illustrations

The age of specialisation has not left the world of art untouched. Artists are independent entities pursuing their own individual visions and styles developed according to their own sensibilities. There is a multiplicity of expressions and attitudes. The emphasis being on uniqueness which implies the maintaining of differences rather than discovery of affinities and common ground. None of this is surprising in an age of growing democratic norms which maintain the rights and values of personal development. As a consequence it is now usual for artists to assert their differences even when acknowledging a common umbrella of a particular philosophy of art. The trend has been to focus on single elements. So we have artists who investigate the properties of colour or the interplay of masses or research linear properties etc. There are so many artists who have banished the human figure from art, maintaining that true art, like music, exists in the abstract dimension. There are others for whom the human dimension is paramount. Nearly all agree that art is not illustration as this category does not take into account the formal elements which seem essential to the making of any kind of art. Illustration is considered as subserving a text or a delightful appendage.

Laila Rehman, a distinguished artist and graphicist has shown courage in entering a territory so full of biased opinions. She has refused to acknowledge the supposedly fixed categories and has asserted her right as an individual and as an artist to operate in a field considered hazardous for artists. Her attempt takes on added significance in dealing with folklore which is a repository of layered stories and accumulated wisdom. It is not an avenue for personal indulgence.

She has given old Punjabi tales a visual existence. Something they never had before. Raja Rasalu now has a recognisable appearance as do the other characters in the story. Birds, beasts and humans throng this universe. Akin to the narrative, her paintings carry within them multiple significances. They can be seen quite simply as illustrations to the text, or they can be relished as paintings in their own right. Best of all they can be seen as analogous to the text. For example, when a dark secret is being shared, a parrot hidden in the foliage overhears. So too, in the painting the parrot is appropriately hidden in a dark mass and has to be searched out. In keeping with the element of fantasy in the story, the paintings maintain a kind of middle ground between earthly physical happenings and their extensions into fantasy. There is a continuous interplay between what we readily recognise and that which our imagination makes credible. Nor does Laila fall into the trap of cartooning with its play on exaggerations.

Lying beneath the fable and fantasy is a refined sensibility coupled with power of formal control. The drawings are placed in circles and resemble medallions carrying overtones of formality and authority. The frontispiece of Raja Rasalu, Fauladi and Shadi ensconced in a circle announces with a degree of solemnity, the drama which is to unfold.

Finally, this volume and the art it contains is not to be mistaken as a book for children. Certainly children are bound to enjoy the stories which have been told and retold over many generations, particularly in our villages. They are bound to relish the paintings and drawings which actualise and vivify the text. At the same time the adult participants, particularly those who dwell in cities, are bound to feel reconnected with their rich heritage.

**Krishen Khanna
New Delhi, 2006**