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The Tales of Parrot and the Sea of Desire: A Critical Reading of *Sukasaptati's* Translations Across Languages and Cultures

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Abstract: Stories, born from words, have the power to transcend time and space, fostering connections among diverse cultures. This paper delves into the oral narratives and epic poetry that illustrate how imagination, retelling, and collective memory shape communities, often transcending geographical boundaries. Focusing on the Parrot's tale, which traces its origins to the Jataka tales (300BC-400AD), this study examines select extended versions, particularly the English translation of the Sanskrit *Sukasaptati* (The Seventy Tales Told by the Parrot) by B. Hale Wortham, the Persian Tootinameh (Tales of Parrot) translated by Muhammad Qadiri, and the Malay Haikat Bayan Baudiman. The analysis highlights the cultural exchanges and reinterpretations inherent in these stories. Wortham's collection, for instance, contains seventy stories, though one scandalous tale is notably missing. Tootinameh's reprint features thirty-five stories, down from the original fifty-two, while Haikat Bayan Baudiman includes twenty-four stories, with only eight matching Qadiri's translation. The tales often focus on women's cleverness and sexual adventures, challenging traditional roles and societal norms. For example, in The Enchanted Parrot, a young wife named Prabhavati is prevented from infidelity through the Parrot's captivating storytelling. Similarly, Tootinameh and Haikat Bayan Baudiman explore themes of desire, wit, and moral lessons, albeit with varying cultural contexts and narrative structures. Ultimately, these translations illustrate a rich tapestry of cross-cultural interactions, borrowing, and recontextualization, demonstrating the enduring power of storytelling in reflecting and shaping human experiences across different societies and eras.

I am the wonder of the world, ravisher of hearts.
Once you have seen my stunning looks, you are a fallen man[i]
- Safiyya al-Baghadiyya

Storytelling, the oldest form of art known to humans has played a crucial role in shaping our worlds and worldviews. Our engagements with oral narratives and enquiries to deconstruct the form as well as performative dimension of epic poetry has helped us to understand how imagination, interpretation/retelling and collective memory shapes communities and continuities; challenging the

limitations imposed by cartographers and geographical interruptions. Words were tamed to make stories and stories have the power to tame time as well as the mind. When humans travelled fictions woven using the power of imagination to enthrall and educate humans accompanied them to new spaces where they were heard, memorised and retold. These narrative bridges initiated dialogues and crafted unique unbreakable links between people, societies and cultures. With the taming of the ocean, travels across sea became an important medium of exchange between cultures and communities. Trade routes on land like the Silk Route and the sea routes of the Indian Ocean played a crucial role in enabling dialogue and exchange of ideas between the Indian sub-continent and the Arab world. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami in 'Early Arab Contact with South Asia' traces connections as far back as to the ancient times "long before the rise of Islam or the Muslim conquest of South Asia" but it was "Arab navigational interests brought South Asia and Arabia closer" and "it was through the merchants that India and Arabia came to know each other and there began a process of cultural intercourse" (52-53) that would have an everlasting impact on all spheres of life. Sea faring particularly accelerated and broadened the scope of these exchanges and brought into focus the figure of the merchant in literature who travels to distant lands in search of fortune and fame. While most of us have heard the fantastical tales of Sindabad, the adventure seeking fortune hunter who rides the waves of Indian Ocean from *One Thousand One Nights Cycle* we rarely come across stories in popular retellings about their female counterparts. The accounts of women who stayed home while the men ventured into the sea to pursue their mercantile endeavors are rarely recounted. What did the women do when their partners or husbands were away from home for an extended period of time? How did they wrestle boredom and keep themselves busy? Was there an exchange of ideas and narratives about women in this era of rich cultural exchange? If so what were they about? To answer some of the questions raised above in this paper I would trace the journey of a unique frame narrative that draws our attention towards the 'home' and the attempts of a female subject to assert her subjectivity in the absence of her husband. The discussion would primarily focus on the transformation that the tales told by the Parrot undergoes as it is relayed across different geographical locations, languages and cultures. The shortest versions of the Parrot's tale can be traced back to the Jataka tales written somewhere between 300BC to 400AD but the primary focus of this paper would be on select longer rescensions. Since it is impossible to work with all the versions of this popular tale in one paper, I would particularly focus on the English version of the Sanskrit collection of tales *Sukasaptati* or *The Seventy Tales Told by the Parrot* that dates back to 12th Century, selected and translated by B. Hale Wortham titled as *The Enchanted Parrot*[ii], the reprint of Ziya al-Din Nakshabi's Persian version *Tootinameh*[iii] or *Tales of Parrot* translated by Muhammad Qadiri and the Malay version *Haikat Bayan Baudiman*. The first set as the title suggests is suppose to have seventy stories but the eighteenth story in Wortham's version is missing. Critics argue that the zoophilic nature of the story was too scandalous to be included and published as a part of the collection. The early version of

Tootinameh's translation had fifty-two stories but the reprint brought out under Qadiri's guidance has thirty-five stories and the longer version of *Haikat Bayan Baudiman* has twenty-four stories out of which sixteen are also found in *Hikayat Bakhtiyar* and only eight stories match Qadiri's English version of the Persian retelling (Fang 2013 291). Kali Hasan is credited with the translation of the Persian version to Javanese in 14th Century. In this paper a detailed analysis of the select translations would highlight how this collection of stories is an extraordinary specimen of cross-cultural interactions, borrowings and recontextualizations.

Where to
girl with bright thighs?
There is no moon tonight.

Out to my lover.

Not afraid, young in the darkness
to travel alone?

Can't you see-at my side
With lethal arrows the
love god?[iv]

In *The Enchanted Parrot*, the narrator of the stories; the 'wise' Parrot is given to Haridatta, a man from a noble family by a Brahmin called Trivikrama. The Parrot is Trivikrama's remedy to Haridatta's sufferings as the former has immense faith in the Parrot's knowledge and wisdom. He believes that the Parrot will mend the wayward ways of Haridatta's son Madana, grant the troubled man much needed relief from his worries and ensure happiness in the household. Madana as instructed by his father puts the Parrot in a cage and places it in his room and the talking bird as predicted by Trivikrama, reforms Madana. The tale of Devasarma, a young Brahmin who abandoned his duties as a son in his quest to find divine wisdom narrated by the caged Parrot sets Madana free from the vices that overpowered him and enables his transformation into a dutiful son. Its ability to educate and instruct through storytelling minus overt moralizing clearly proves to be an effective strategy. Madana soon sets off on a journey to a far off country leaving his wife Prabhavati behind at home. Prabhavati, the lonely young wife dutifully mourns her husband's absence for a few days but soon gives into her friends' advice and pangs of desire. She decides to make the most of her youth by having an affair with Ganachandra but the Parrot tactfully interrupts and foils Prabhavati's plans by distracting her with stories. In the absence of Prabhavati's husband who is ironically the God of desire's

namesake it is the *vahana* or the deity's mount, the Parrot that employs the God's craft of sweet talk and arrests Prabhavati's pursuits for pleasure in the cage of stories.

Prabhavati who is initially irked by the Parrot's admonishment and plans to ask "her servants to wring the parrot's neck as soon as she was gone" (Wortham 1911 13) is curious to know the fate of the "woman of light character who dragged the merchant's son about by his hair" (Wortham 1911 14) with whom the Parrot compares her. The Parrot slyly enchants the irked lady by narrating the tale of 'Mohana and Lakshmi'. Prabhavati's imagination is temporarily overpowered by the narrative of Lakshmi's dealings with the Purna the procuress and her tryst with Mohana while her husband is away like Madana. Purna, Mohana's messenger conveys his feelings to Lakshmi and requests her to invite him home. As a "respectable woman" Lakshmi refuses to invite Mohana home but decides to bestow a favour on Purna as she has already accepted a fee from Mohana. She agrees to meet him at Purna's place. A matter of chance prevents Mohana from attending the much awaited meeting and Purna to satiate the carnal desire of eagerly waiting Lakshmi finds her another paramour for the night. To Lakshmi's surprise this new man turns out to be her own husband who has returned early from his mercantile ventures. She employs her wit and starts abusing and beating her husband whom she claims to have caught red-handed cheating her. By the sheer use of ready wit and tact Lakshmi turns the situation an adverse situation in her favour just like the Parrot that saves itself from the wrath of its mistress by distracting her from the situation at hand. The story ends but it is too late for Prabhavati to venture out and her plans are stalled till the next evening and so is the punishment of the insolent Parrot. The Parrot does keep its audience on tenterhooks for a while after it divulges the details of sprightly Lakshmi's new visitor but it does not use the cliffhanger method employed by the Scheherazade in the *Arabian Nights*. The Parrot's first cautionary tale clearly has an effect on Prabhavati because before venturing out the next evening she comes to the Parrot for advice. The Parrot exercises the same strategy and once again ensnares Prabhavati in the web of yet another captivating tale of the cunning entrapment laid by Yasodevi to fulfill her son's longing for the Prince's daughter-in-law Sasiprabha. Yasodevi in 'Yashodevi and her Transmutations' comes to know about her son's love for a royal lady and hatches an incredible plan to ensure that his affection is returned. She takes a bitch along with her when she goes to meet the princess. She convinces the unsuspecting lady that all three of them were sisters in the previous birth and makes up a tall tale the sister who refused the advances of her lovers is now reborn as a bitch and thus coerces the prince/o/ ss into taking a paramour that is her son Dhanasena while she bribes the husband Rajasekera with gold and expensive jewels. The second story too like the first celebrates the intelligence of women but in this case it is the ingenious workings of the elderly lady's mind that draws our attention and appreciation.

The first two stories of *Sukasaptati* or *The Enchanted Parrot* do not find a place in Nakshabi's selection in *Tootinameh* but similar versions can be traced to the 15th Century text *The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delight* by Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Nafzawi. In the chapter titled 'Woman's Tricks' Nafzawi while cautioning the reader about the cunning of women tells the story of a man whose romantic overtures are initially turned down by a beautiful woman. An old hag who is a procuress coerces a lady using tactics similar to those employed by Yashodevi in or *The Enchanted Parrot* but her efforts go in vain when the man like Mohana in the first story as told to Prabhavati fails to turn up. The procuress like the one in the first story gets another man who incidentally turns out to be the husband of the lady. The quick thinking lady reacts like the agile Lakshmi: she pretends as if she designed the plot to catch her husband red-handed, creates a scene and accuses him of infidelity. Narratives about women in Nafzawi's compendium on the erotic as well as *The Enchanted Parrot* that retells at least twenty-five stories revolve around women's sexual escapades. They are about the adventures of smart women, how they outwit society (especially their husband's) who try to contain and straightjacket the complex workings of female desire. Pernilia Myrne in the *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World* highlights the intellectual and scholarly interest in sexual health and human behavior that lead to the birth of a new field called erotology in ninth century. This new interest not only lead to the translation of parts of Indian texts like *Kamasutra* but also was instrumental in making of Arabic erotic compendium like the *Jawami al-Ladhdha* or the *Encyclopaedia of Pleasure*. These focus of these texts was on teaching men the art of pleasuring women. (Myrne 2020 42) The stories discussed above challenge the ideological conceptualizations that frame the figure of the perfect housewife whose attention and labour is always channelized 'within' the household and 'away' from her own body and self. It is not just the women from the leisure class who are indulging in such "devious" pursuits but also the hard working wife from the lower classes who cares for, and acts on the erotic needs of her body. The women in these stories are a heterogeneous bunch they belong to different social classes and settings and remind us. Their uninhibited actions of women in *Sukasaptati* remind us the observation of Madhavi Menon in the Introduction to *Infinite Variety: A History of Desire in India* that "The history of Desire in India reveals not purity but *im*purity as a way of life. Not one answer but many. Not a single history, but multiple tales cutting across laws and boundaries" (Menon 2018 9). Their "licentious" actions in most cases go undetected the only story in which a woman is caught and a brutal punishment is that of a King's wife. It is interesting to note how older women play a crucial role in helping young and desirable women to break out of the conformist role of a "good" wife. Similarly, an old female servant of the Prince plays a crucial role. She makes many attempts to bring together Khoja Maimun's wife and the Prince in *Hikayat Bayan Baudiman*. These older women are undoubtedly driven by ulterior motives like money or love for their sons but they nonetheless interrupt patriarchal interpretations of home and wifely duties as they provoke women to embrace the erotic and sensual aspects of their life. If we consider the Parrot's

selection of stories carefully then it appears as if its agenda is almost in sync with that of the older ladies. Why does the Parrot begin with and then go on to dedicate a sizeable portion of the narrative to stories of women's adventures outside the socially sanctioned space of marriage celebrating the quick wit of women if its real intent is to dissuade Prabhavati from pursuing the path of desire? Is the Parrot making an attempt to substitute the Prabhavati's feeling of real fulfillment by recounting similar successful tales of amour till the innocent heroine, easily misguided by her friends is adequately trained and learns the way of the world before she walks into the night alone?

Even though *Tootinameh* is often cited uncritically as *Sukasaptati's* Persian translation it would be better to use the Sanskrit equivalence *anuvaad* to label the recreation of the text in a new language and context because it has a distinct flavor of its own. Harish Trivedi in "Introduction: Of colonies, cannibals and vernaculars" in *Post-Colonial: Theory and Practice* points out that the term *anuvaad* "etymologically and primarily means 'saying after or again, repeating by way of explanation, explanatory repetition or reiteration with corroboration or illustration, explanatory reference to anything already said" and the "underlying metaphor in the word *anuvad* is temporal- to say *after*, to repeat - rather than spatial as in English/Latin word translation – to carry across" (Basnett and Trivedi 1999 9). Despite working with similar narrative device i.e., the Parrot, the frame narrative of the home alone wife who develops feelings for "another man" and a couple of similar stories within the frame it does create a unique world with a very different message for its audience. Ahmed Sultan a prince, like Haridatta in *Sukasaptati* or *The Enchanted Parrot* is a troubled soul when the narrative opens but the reasons for his worries are very different. He has everything that one can ask for but unfortunately is bereft of an heir. All his prayers are answered when the precocious Miemun is born to him. Miemun is happily married to the beautiful and enlivening Khojisteh when he sees the Parrot in the market place. It is Miemun not Ahmed Sultan who gets the Parrot home. He is impressed by the Parrot's financial advice in the marketplace and buys it from the parrot seller who asks for an exorbitant price but says little to convince the buyer. It is the Parrot that delivers the sales pitch for its sale by calling itself an eloquent adviser, possesesor of the "power of wisdom and knowledge" and proves its mettle to Miemun by giving him good financial advice. On the bird's counsel Miemun hoards all the spikenard available in the market before the caravan from Kabul arrives and later on sells it to the travelling merchants to make fifty times the profit. In this narrative it is the Parrot's eagerness to associate with "great and intelligent minds" to improve its understanding that brings it closer to Miemun and not the other way around like it transpires in *The Enchanted Parrot*.

Miemun is a good master, he gets another bird/ Sharuk, for keeping the Parrot company. Soon after he leaves for a journey to a "certain" country and discloses his intention to "visit several ports" to Khojisteh.

For reasons unknown he asks her not to seek "advice and consent" of the Parrot and the Sharuk in business matters or other weighty affairs and asks her to carry out her intentions to execution in an independent manner. Khojisteh is sad but is entertained by the Parrot's stories in Meimun's absence till one day six months later a Prince from another country passes by the town. He is enamored by Khojisteh's beauty as soon as he sees her, she too drawn towards him and is pleased to receive a proposition from him. He sends a secret message to her through a procuress that if she meets him any night for four hours he would give her a ring worth a lakh huns. Khojisteh resfuses initially but eventually gives into the requests of the procuress. Right before Khojisteh leaves to meet the Prince she decides to confide her feelings in Sharuk. She thinks that the bird by virtue of being a female would be empathetic towards her actions but Khojisteh's guess proves wrong. The bird turns out to be a well trained agent of patriarchy: it bluntly prohibits Khojisteh from pursuing her interests, berates and reminds her that her actions would be considered "heinous and disgraceful" by the people of her tribe. On hearing these words Khojisteh is overpowered by anger; she throws the bird with such force on the ground that it dies on the spot. The Sharuk's fate and Khojisteh's reaction are similar to that of the Brahmin's wife who wrung the neck of the Parrot in Jataka tales[v]. Seething in anger Khojisteh goes to the Parrot, shares her feelings as well as the news of Sharuk's death. The Parrot well updated with the chain of events decides to humour Khojisteh, badmouths Sharuk, criticizes the lack of wisdom in most females and suggests the lady to never confide in women. It swears its allegiance to Khojisteh and promises to broker peace between her and her husband like the sagacious parrot of Ferukh Beg if ever there is trouble in the paradise. *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* translated by Richard F. Burton has two tales namely 'The Tale of the Husband and the Parrot' and 'Story of the Confectioner, His Wife, and the Parrot' that have a similar storyline but in both the stories the mistress outwits the Parrot and in one the bird is killed by the angry master only to repent later.

It is with the story of Ferukh Beg's parrot the chain of stories that will shackle Khojisteh to the home are set into motion. The theme of a wife's infidelity is central to this narrative but unlike first story in *The Enchanted Parrot*, the woman in this tale is bailed out by the Parrot and not by using her own wit. This story as well as the next one titled 'The Fiedelity of a Sentinel towards the King of Teberistan' underline the loyalty of a good servant. It appears as if the Parrot is convincing Khojisteh about its loyalty, winning her complete trust and ensuring that the lady does not kill her. The third story 'The Goldsmith and the Carpenter; and the Theft and Concealment of the Golden Images' is primarily important for three reasons: the characters in the story are located somewhere in the Indian sub-continent, artisans or characters from the working class are in the lead roles and the logic employed by the wronged carpenter is very similar to that of the thirty-ninth story in *The Enchanted Parrot* titled 'The Iron Weights and Scales were eaten by the Mice'. Budhara, the merchant in the story who is duped by his friend like the carpenter kidnaps the son to teach the greedy friend turned foe a lesson and counters the absurd arguments of the accused with similar

tell tall claims to prove the truth. The fourth story is that of the virtuous wife with a husband who constantly doubts her and how she proves her loyalty. The fifth one 'The Goldsmith, the Carpenter, the Taylor, and the Hermit, who quarreled about a Wooden Woman' is the fantastical tale of a statue in the form of a woman that is brought to life and seven men quarrelling over her. It ends with the tree splitting open on listening to the absurd claims of the men while the woman choses to take shelter and become one with the tree. The ending of the story has striking resemblance with the scene in *Ramayana* wherein the ground splits in two and offers a resting place for the disillusioned Sita. But there are other versions of this story retold in the middle east with a different ending. In one version the woman is given to the Hermit by the Qazi because he breathes life into the statue as this act clearly stands out and cannot stand in comparison with that of the carpenter, tailor and the goldsmith who carve, dress and decorate the lifeless statue. Similar logic is employed to determine the suitor of the Merchant's daughter Zerah who is extraordinarily beautiful in the twenty-second story titled 'The Merchant whose Daughter was lost'. The suitor who risks his life to recover the girl from the clutches of an evil fairy risking his life is married off to the damsel. Heroic actions are rewarded in the moral universe of these tales but since all the men in the fifth tale are petty and self-absorbed the woman has to go back to where she came from. 'The King of Kinoge and his Daughter, with whom a Dirveish became enamoured' is a love story with an unlikely suitor winning the hand of the princess followed by 'The Fowler, the Parrot and the young ones' that recounts the tale of a parrot outwitting its master and finding release from the confines of its cage.

The eight and the ninth stories in *Tootinameh* can be traced back to *Sukasaptati* or *The Enchanted Parrot*. The eight tale is very similar to that of 'Mohana and Lakshmi' that kickstarts the English translation of the Sanskrit version but in this the woman is not a novice like Lakshmi. The Parrot's reasons to tell this tale to the restless wife are also very different. In *Sukasaptati* the Parrot tells Prabhavati this story to provide her an insight into the behavior of women who belong to "low character" providing her with some gossip about unruly women whereas in *Tootinameh* the Parrot explicitly asks Khojisteh to follow the suit of the women in the story "If it should happen that your husband arrives and meets you anywhere follow the example of the merchant's wife and scold him" (Qadiri 1801 62-63). The ninth story titled 'The Shopkeeper's Wife, who having an Amour with a Person, confounded her Father-in-law' is told by the Parrot to give Khojisteh an example of a woman whose quick thinking saved her from being caught and getting "injured" can also be located in *Sukasaptati* and is titled as 'What Sridevya did when she lost her Anklet'. The tenth story too is told by the Parrot for Khojisteh's instruction if she is ever betrayed by her lover. The story is about a free spirited woman, the merchant's daughter married to an ugly, ill tempered stupid man who gets attracted to a young man and runs away with him. They spend a night together under a tree but when she wakes up she finds that the youth is gone and her jewellery is missing. The woman lost, dejected and pensive is standing

by the pond when she meets the jackal. The cunning animal asks the woman to go home acting like a madwoman: laughing, singing and dancing so that nobody can find fault with her absence. There is only one more story that recounts the adventures of the transgressing women from *Sukasaptati* that reappears in *Tootinameh*. This is the twenty-fifth tale ttitled 'Of a Woman, who, having gone to buy Sugar, had an Amour with Grocer' is a very close retelling of story number thirteen titled 'The Wily Rajika' and thirty-two titled 'Rajani and the Bundle of Wheat'. Apart from this it is the eighteenth story 'Of the Intimacy of Besheer with a Woman named Chunder' revolves around a married woman called Chunder's love affair with Besheer and Basheer's friend accidental sexcapade with Chunder's sister-in-law. In total there are only five stories about women looking for sexual pleasure and their dabbling with the world of erotic in *Tootinameh* and do not celebrate the wit and quick thinking of women as we witness in *Sukasaptati*. If *kama* or desire is the primary focus of the narrative of *Sukasaptati* then duty, fate and greed are the recurrent themes of its later retelling. 'The Woman who by a Strategem escaped out of the Lion's Clutches' is also found in *Sukasaptati* titled 'The Lady Tiger Slayer' and acts as the frame for two more animal centric stories that impart moral wisdom. Interestingly, the *Tootinameh* version ends with the wife swearing life-long obedience to her husband if she escapes the Tiger. Similarly, the love struck King of 'The Merchant's Daughter, whom the King rejected, who unaware on the Merchant's daughter beauty rejects the proposal to marry her on his ministers' advice later on sees her, regrets his behavior but refuses to approach her because she is married to the Kotwal. Even though the King has the power to approach and possess any woman he wants he refuses to demand her from the Kotwal: "I will not be guilty of an action so very repugnant to justice; it does not become monarchs to behave with such tyranny towards their subjects and servants" (Qadiri 1801 132). The King in this story is an absolute contrast to the one found in *Hikayat Bayan Baudiman* in the story titled 'Raja Kilan Shah and his Son' who is an absolute tyrant. Vladamir Braginsky points out that the figure of the tyrant king is a stock figure that is drawn from Malay tales. The complete manuscripts of *Hikayat Bayan Baudiman* have twenty-four stories in which twelve are from Nakshabi's *Tutinama* and the rest are drawn from other sources.

Sir Richard Winstedt in his book *A History of Classical Malay Literature* points out the existence of many versions of *Hikayat Bayan Baudiman's* or *The Wise Parrot's Tale* also called *Hikayat Khojah Maimun*, *Hikayat Khojah Mubarak* and *Cherita Taifah*. He also points out how some of the tales appear in other Malay texts like *Hikayat Kalila dan Damina* or *Panchatantra*, *Angling Darma*, *Hikayat Shah-i- Mardan*, *Nakhoda Muda* and *Hikayat Puspa Wairaja* apart from *Hikayat Bakhtiyar*. Winstedt highlights how few sentences bear exact resemblance to the Sanskrit version despite the text being a translation of the Persian version *Tootinameh*. Elements of strong Arabic influence on its language[vi] and religious influence of Islam on the translated version cannot be overlooked. The Parrot and Khoja Maimun, the merchant in *Haikat*

Bayan Baudiman strangely have a strong resemblance to the friendly Parrot who is the "secret keeper" and wants to ensure peace in domestic sphere and the hero who comes back to settle smoothly into the life of domesticity with his wife Bibi Zainab like Madana does with Prabhavati in *Sukasaptati*. *Haikat Bayan Baudiman's* introductory section is quite similar to that of *Tootinameh* but the concluding section resembles *Sukasaptati* that ends on a happy note. While the Parrot in *Sukasaptati* is released from the curse that contained in the form of a parrot and makes an ascent into heaven the magical Parrot of *Haikat Bayan Baudiman* is set free from its cage by Maimun only to come back after a week with flowers for the happy couple.

The first four stories of *Tootinameh* reappear in the same order in *Hikayat Bayan Baudiman* with changes in the titles. The story titled 'The man who gave half of his life to his wife' and Naim's story are the best examples of how a man's faith in God can make the impossible possible. The first story is not just about the devout husband whose prayers are answered but also about the ungrateful wife who does not have faith in miracles performed by God and has to lose the life that is bestowed by Him as an answer to her husband's prayers. The story of the heartbroken king who dies of grief in *Tootinameh* is retold in 'Raja Harman Shah' but it is Raja Ahmed's wife Princess Safiah who nurtures forbidden love for her brother-in-law and dies of heartbreak when her brother-in-law Raja Harman Shah does not respond to her advances. The story of 'Siti Hasanah' and Bibi Sabariah focus on the lives of faithful wives and what woman can do to do avoid unnecessary attention and celebrates the determination of a good wife to win her husband's attention back in 'Raja Mansur Shah and Her Highness Ratna Gemala'. The last tale in *Tootinameh* titled 'A King falls in love' in which a king wrongfully suspects his wife of infidelity and realizes his mistake also reappears in the later retelling. This collection is particularly interesting because it has stories of a woman cross dressing as man and becoming the king as told in 'Siti Hasanah', a merchant's boundless love for his slave in 'Khoja Astor and young Abyssinian slave' and also because it retells a famous tragedy i.e., of 'Seri and Farhad'. 'Seri and Farhad' and the tale that follows titled 'The princess who killed all her husbands' are new additions that add a dark tone to the stories in the compendium. The story of the princess is quite unique because it presents women in a completely new light: the betrayed, avenging manslayer, a female version of the vengeful prince from *The Thousand and One Nights Cycle*.

Stories from *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesa* and *Betal Pacchisi* make their way into *Tootinameh* replacing some mundane tales that offer glimpses into the life of ordinary people in *Sukasaptati* whereas stories from the Malay world and the Tantri that give an insight into everyday life and "state wisdom" as pointed out Braginsky make an entry into *Haikat Bayan Baudiman*. The story of the Jackal that accidentally spills indigo dye on itself and turns blue from the *Panchatantra* and the story of the old lion who hires a cat to keep the mice away from its teeth from the *Hitopadesa* are some notable mentions of animal stories

included in this collection replacing woman centric narratives. Expulsions and new entries in the later text shift and redirect the primary focus of the narrative from the erotic and woman's body towards tales that have a strong, central message and deliver moral wisdom. It makes the audience aware about avarices like greed, cautions them against the dangers of be-friending ungrateful people and repeatedly emphasizes on *kismet* or predestination. Perhaps this shift is necessary because the listener in the tale is not a merchant's wife, Khojisteh is royalty. She has to be trained to act responsibly because her manners and actions will not just have an impact on her family but also on the kingdom a s well as the subjects, especially in her husband's absence. Perhaps, that is the reason why Miemun asks her to act independently, he trusts the good sense of his wife more than his servant and financial advisor i.e, the Parrot. Or is it because he wants to keep the details of his wife's engagements and dealings away from the prying eyes of the public? Whatever reasons guide Miemun's suggestions before his departure his actions after his return are quick and unchangeable. Miemun on seeing the Parrot alone asks it about its companion and as an answer to Miemun's question it tells him about Sharuk's death and Khojisteh's pursuits. On hearing the Parrot's report Miemun doesn't even seek any explanation from Khojisteh but swiftly "puts an end to her life". The ending is quite abrupt and it is quite unclear as to why Miemun kills Khojisteh: is it because she killed a helpless bird or because he gets such a clear report about her dealings from the Parrot? He definitely cannot not mete out such a cruel punishment for a crime that Khojisteh was suppose to commit but has not yet committed it. If the strength of *Sukasaptati*'s or *The Enchanted Parrot's* narrative lies in the fact that it presents a polyphony of characters from all walks of life and celebrates the wit of the ordinary people then, *Tootinameh* lends a dialogic quality to the narrative and adds the elements of fantasy and magic. In a good few stories the Parrot of *Tootinameh* pauses in the narration and poses questions to Khojisteh as if it is trying to test the intelligence and ready wit of the listener. In one instance Khojisteh also takes on the role of the narrator and tells the Parrot a very short story about a man who wants to visit Mecca breaking the fixed roles of the active speaker and the passive listener. The deadly combination of Khojisteh's social position i.e, the daughter-in-law the Prince, her beauty and her intelligence make her a more dangerous subversive figure than Prabhavati or Bibi Zainab from *Haikat Bayan Baudiman* who are wives of merchants. Therefore, she has to face a much severe punishment like the King's wife in the story titled 'The Queen and the Laughing Fish' in *The Enchanted Parrot*.

The transmission, selection, omission and recreation of the stories told by the Parrot over a period of eight hundred years does go through a sea of change but they do retain continuity by using the frame of the Parrot storyteller and the listener, the 'desiring subject' a female who is posing the threat of threat of transgression to the dominant discourse. The larger frame acts as a reminder of the "primitive promiscuity" of women that was considered "the most dangerous threat" by colonial modernity and the compendiums on sexual

pleasure composed in India and in the Arab world help us to remember the curiosity our cultures had in women's body and the importance given to women's sexual pleasure and orgasm in the precolonial world.

[i] Segol, Marla. "Representing the Body in Poems by Medieval Muslim Women." *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality*. Vol. 45. No. 1. Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship, 2009

[ii] https://archive.org/stream/cu31924022986115/cu31924022986115_djvu.txt

[iii]https://books.google.co.in/books?id=NllIAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA10&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false

[iv] "Girl with Bright Thighs" from *Amarusataka*

[v] *The Jataka; or, Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, edited by E. B. Cowell, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1895), no. 198, pp. 92-94. Translated from the Pali by W. H. D. Rouse.

[vi] https://jawimss.wordpress.com/2012/02/15/hello-world/

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