

Urdu and Muslim South Asia:

Studies in honour of Ralph Russell,
Christopher Shackleton, ed.

London: University of London,
School of Oriental and African
Studies, 1989.

Emperor of India: Landhaur bin Sa'dān in the
Hamza cycle

FRANCES W. PRITCHETT

Ralph Russell was the first Western scholar to pay serious attention to the Urdu *dāstān*, or prose romance. He marshalled the available evidence about the history of the genre, said a few words about dastan plots and characterization, and emphasized the importance of the dastan as 'the main form of Urdu prose narrative before the modern period'.¹ His brief discussion was the first reference I had ever seen to dastan literature, and it caught my interest immediately. Dastans have now become part of my life, and Ralph Russell has become a most valued friend and mentor. It is a pleasure to dedicate this article to him.

Nowadays surprisingly little attention is paid to a genre which was indeed 'the main form of Urdu prose narrative before the modern period'. After reaching unprecedented heights of popularity in the latter half of the nineteenth century, dastans have generally had a bad press in the twentieth: they have been perceived as unrealistic, irrelevant, perversely escapist. Dastan literature has thus suffered from neglect; and modern Urdu fiction has suffered too, for it has been unable to claim the superb achievements of the best dastan literature as its inheritance.

The Urdu dastan tradition itself was, by contrast, sure of its roots, and very proud of them. Urdu dastan literature grew out of Persian dastan literature — or rather, mostly out of one single Persian dastan, that of Amīr Hamza. While in Iran the Hamza story was simply one of a number of medieval romances,² outside Iran it attained a popularity equalled only by that of the Alexander Romance. The Hamza romance spread rapidly all over the Islamic world: there are versions of it in Arabic, Turkish (twenty-four volumes), and Georgian;³ also in Malay and Javanese.⁴ In South Asia, it came through medieval Indo-Persian versions, and spread into Sindhi, Pashto, Panjabi, Hindi, and as far east as Bengali.⁵ But above all, it flourished in Urdu. The dastan of Amīr Hamza not only developed far more elaborately in Urdu than it ever had in its Persian homeland — it also developed along what in some cases were distinctively Indian lines.

Since the dastan world knows no form of government except monarchy, all dastan lands have kings — there are kings of Chīn (meaning

parts of southern Central Asia), Misr (Egypt), Rūm (meaning Constantinople), Yaman (Yemen), Yūnān (Greece), Tūrān (Turkestan), etc. These places are real in a sense, but they are also remote enough to be exotic; they are places where wonderful or terrible things might happen. Many of Hamza's adventures involve journeys to such places, and encounters with their kings.

Among other rulers of such exotic regions, Hamza also encounters and conquers Landhaur bin Sa'dān, son of Sa'dān Shāh, king of what the pre-Safavid Persian *Qissa-e Hamza* calls 'the twelve thousand islands of Sarandīb'.⁶ Sarandīb or Sarandīp is a well-known region of the story-telling world, loosely identified with Sri Lanka. King Landhaur plays no exceptional role in the early Persian Hamza cycle: he is merely one more chivalrous adversary, honorably defeated by Hamza after elaborate, prolonged single combat, who accepts Islam and joins the small band of Hamza's close companions.⁷ But in the Urdu cycle, he becomes a strikingly important figure. Egypt and Greece and other lands are remote and almost legendary, but India is now home. Landhaur, the 'Emperor of India' (*xusrav-e hindūstān*), becomes charged with a special significance.

Landhaur's name is an unusual one, and stands out among the elegant, picturesque, or vulgar names normally given to dastan characters. The name has acquired an Indic-sounding aspirate *dh* only in Urdu; in classical Persian his name is Land-hor, 'son of the Sun'. The well-known seventeenth-century Indo-Persian dictionary *Burhān-e qāṭi* (Calcutta 1834) explains his name somewhat confusedly: 'It is the faith of the Brahmins that when the great Sun looked at his mother, she became pregnant, and this is why the Persians call him Landhor.' The later *Šams ul luḡāt* (Bombay 1891) is more explicit: 'Landhor is the name of an Indian king who is called Rāja Karn in the Hindī [=Indian] language, because it is the faith of the Brahmins and Hindus that the Sun cast a kindly glance on his mother, who was called Kuntī. She became pregnant, and that is why the Iranians have named him Landhor, that is, the son of the Sun, because *land* means "son" and *hor* is the Sun. God knows the correct thing best.'⁸ Landhaur is thus identified by these dictionaries with the hero Karna of the *Mahābhārata*, who was the son of the sun-god Sūrya and the princess Kuntī. Of course it is an after-the-fact identification; but it shows how strongly Landhaur was perceived as an Indian hero, with roots reaching even into Sanskrit story tradition.

Another Indic source for Landhaur's name has been suggested by a modern Indian historian, V. S. Agrawala, who argues that the great warrior and king Pratāpa Rudra Deva (1295-1323) of Warangal, referred to by Amīr Khusrau and others as Luddar Dīv, evolved into Landhaur 'Dev'.⁹ But this seems doubtful: Landhaur is not given the title 'Dīv' or 'Dev' in any version of the story I have yet examined. 'Dev' is taken seriously in Urdu dastan tradition as the name of a demon species, and Landhaur is certainly not a demon.

According to the most popular Urdu version of the romance,¹⁰ Hamza is commanded by his liege lord, Naushervān, the King of Kings of the

Seven Realms, to seek Landhaur out and kill him; Hamza swears to do so. After many vicissitudes Hamza arrives in Sarandīp, and through a series of minor incidents comes to know Landhaur as chivalrous, gallant, generous — a champion with all the qualities Hamza most admires. But Hamza is true to his pledged word, and forces Landhaur to take the field against him. (Landhaur rides a female elephant called Maimūna, and has an army full of thirty-one carefully named groups, tribes, and castes of Indians.) The two champions finally wrestle for three days and nights, but neither can budge the other. Even on the fourth day when Hamza gives his famous battle-cry, he can lift Landhaur only as high as his cheek, not all the way above his head. But Landhaur then surrenders, submits himself to Hamza, and embraces Islam. Hamza adopts him as a brother, subject only to the condition that they must go together before Naushervān.

At court, however, Naushervān's evil counsellor Bakhtak has poisoned the king's mind — never a difficult thing to do — with fears that Hamza and his growing band of powerful companions might plan to seize the throne. The vacillating Naushervān gives Bakhtak permission to deal with the situation. Bakhtak insists on having Landhaur's head, in literal fulfilment of Hamza's oath. Hamza and Landhaur, faced with this grim prospect, are of one mind: they consent, and prepare to play out their lofty roles of feudal loyalty to the death.

But against them are ranged their companions, who all flatly refuse to carry out the order of execution. Moved by Landhaur's gallantry, they would rather die with him than kill him. This passive resistance is itself a special, feudally correct form of loyal protest, for we know them all to be eager, fierce, and heroic warriors. Even the impeccable Landhaur contrives to remind everyone, by playing alarmingly with his huge mace, that he submits through choice rather than weakness; Naushervān's fearful reaction creates a fine touch of humour.

'Amar the trickster' *ayyār* then prepares to take drastic action. We in the audience know 'Amar's violent and unscrupulous tactics very well: when he hastily slips behind the royal executioner's back we know he has a plan. Just at that point, however, the queen arrives, and her timely intervention rescues Landhaur (Bilgrami 1969: 166-169). Nothing similar to this episode ever occurs again; in a highly patterned story, it is unique. And nothing like it occurs in the Persian *Qissa-e Hamza* at all.

Landhaur's later career includes other adventures that link him especially to Hamza. Hamza and Landhaur are, for example, the only heroes in the dastan who are lifted up into the supernatural realm of Qāf; both kill Devs, marry Paris, and beget children there.¹¹ At one point, as both are in Qāf and killing Devs simultaneously, they even hear each other's battle-cries from afar (Bilgrami 1969: 365).

Such selective expansion of locally popular characters, like Landhaur and 'Amar, and locally popular themes, like magic and trickery, helped the Urdu Hamza romance develop from its relatively modest beginnings

into an extraordinary cycle of forty-six huge volumes. The forty-six-volume *Dāstān-e Amīr Hamza*, a monument to the popularity of dastan literature in its heyday, was published by the Naval Kishor Press in Lucknow, from about 1881 to about 1906.¹² As far as I know, no living human being has read the whole cycle — which is not surprising, since the volumes average about 900 pages each. To the best of my knowledge, there is no complete set of all forty-six volumes in any library.¹³

In this long version, the character of Landhaur develops further, and Landhaur's special relationship with Hamza becomes even more intense. One particularly striking instance can be offered: a serious, almost fatal, clash between Hamza and Landhaur.¹⁴

This clash grows out of a wrestling-bout that takes place, under the gaze of both Muslim and infidel armies, between Landhaur and an infidel warrior called Qahrish bin 'Antar Sūkiya. Neither champion can budge the other, and they wrestle for six days and nights. On the seventh day, Landhaur strikes an unfair blow at Qahrish's windpipe, then conquers his disabled foe with ease (Husain 1900: 301).

Qahrish agrees to accept Islam, and at first all seems to be well. But the new convert wears a hangdog look, and his unhappiness comes to Hamza's attention. When interrogated, Qahrish reveals that Landhaur had defeated him through an unfair blow. Furious, Hamza sends for Landhaur at once, denounces him, and banishes him forever, telling 'Amar, 'Throw this Indian deceiver (*daḡābāz-e hindī*) out of my court, I have no use for such Indian deceivers in my court!' (Husain 1900: 302).

Landhaur then takes leave of his two sons, his huge Indian army, and his elephant Maimūna. He renounces the world, assumes the dress of a faqir, and sets out to wander in the wilderness. This vivid, emotional scene (Husain 1900: 302) has been translated in the Appendix below as Passage A.

Even in the wilderness Landhaur is not safe, however, for his fame as a champion of the Muslim army causes his and Hamza's infidel enemies to seek him out and try to kill him. In great peril, he is obliged to fight for his life against overwhelming odds. But he still has friends at Hamza's court, and chief among them is 'Amar the 'ayyār. 'Amar tries to move Hamza to compassion. Hamza, however, expresses joy at Landhaur's sufferings, and threatens to have 'Amar's tongue cut out if he mentions Landhaur's name again. But 'Amar easily persuades Badī' uz Zamān, one of the most likeable and attractive of Hamza's numerous sons, to ride to Landhaur's rescue.

Badī' uz Zamān joins Landhaur, and is badly wounded in the fighting. Undaunted, he refuses to leave Landhaur's side. In a similar act of magnanimity, Qahrish himself, Landhaur's original opponent, also hastens to Landhaur's defence. His explanation is a model of chivalrous generosity: 'How could I possibly not have come? How could my honour have failed to demand it? Whatever is past is past; I am here to stay with you' (Husain 1900: 312).

But Hamza, unmoved by the gallantry of his own champions — or perhaps in reaction to it — becomes all the harsher toward Landhaur. In the lull that follows after the infidels have been temporarily beaten back, he writes Landhaur a hostile letter, taunting him and demanding single combat. Landhaur receives the letter with reverence, and resolves to end his life rather than do battle with his loved and honoured lord. He says farewell to his friends: 'The only choice for me is to drink a cup of poison tonight, and give up my life for the Sāhib-qirān'.¹⁵ But they react strongly: 'We will all drink a cup of deadly poison with Landhaur, and give up our lives with Landhaur! Without Landhaur there will be no joy in living' (Husain 1900: 323).

Their proposed suicide is averted by news of dire peril: the infidel army, profiting by the dissension in the Muslim camp, has seized the Amir himself and carried him off into captivity. At once everyone goes to the rescue. It is a classic dastan crisis, and we in the audience know that the situation can yet be retrieved. Now all the heroes must exert themselves to the utmost. Hamza too must break his bonds, and rally his mighty champions. Since man-for-man no one in the infidel army can match them, they can still save the day.

As is usual in such cases, 'Amar takes advantage of his special guerrilla-warfare skills of 'ayyārī to penetrate the enemy fort and locate Hamza. But this time the situation is ominous in a frightening new way. Hamza has entirely lost the will to live, and is actually seeking his own death. When 'Amar begs him to break his bonds and join the battle, Hamza commands 'Amar to leave him alone: 'No, now let me be killed. I'm not willing to live; I've had more than my fill of life' (Husain 1900: 327).

Without Hamza's support the battle goes badly. Landhaur, despite his prowess, is now very seriously wounded; he had sent all his weapons and armour away with Maimūna into the forest, and had suffered already in the enemy's earlier attacks on him. 'Amar returns in desperation and tells the news to Hamza, only to receive the same harsh reply: 'That's good, that Landhaur's been wounded! I absolutely won't break my bonds. Don't you hear me? Get out of my presence, or I'll have you captured too!' (Husain 1900: 327). Things could hardly look worse for the Muslim forces.

The whole episode builds to an extraordinary conclusion — one which clearly owes a good deal to the Lakhnavi *marsiya* tradition so prominent in Indian Shi'ism. Landhaur's graphic and heavily emphasized physical suffering, including wounds, faintness, blood, dust, and thirst, coupled with his utter self-abnegation and faithfulness, win him a kind of redemption. This final encounter between Hamza and Landhaur (Husain 1900: 329-330) is here translated in the Appendix as Passage B.

Despite the obvious differences between these two episodes, continuities and resonances make themselves felt. Above all, the emotional alignments are similar: in both episodes Hamza and Landhaur play an obsessive game with each other, following rules which they alone

understand. Others around them, from their exploitative enemies to their indignant companions, find their behaviour bizarre and inappropriate. But the two are deaf to all admonitions and blind to all consequences; they insist on playing out their game to its end.

The game is perfect chivalry and impeccable knightly behaviour; in the first episode Landhaur delights Hamza by observing it, in the second episode he infuriates Hamza by violating it. In both cases Hamza cares disproportionately much about Landhaur's perfect behaviour: he treats Landhaur's honour as part of his own. Hamza values this private, mutual sense of honour above either of their lives; he is ready to let Landhaur die to preserve it, and ready to die himself when it is damaged. Landhaur too enters fully into the pact, and would rather die than break his bond with Hamza. He never defies Hamza, even when all those around him do; he never at all questions Hamza's extravagant behaviour. This special bond between the two heroes is unique. The only other among his companions whom Hamza treats with anything like such intimacy is 'Amar, who as an *'ayyār* stands outside the whole feudal code from the beginning. And not even 'Amar ever evokes such a death-wish in Hamza. The second episode makes it unforgettably clear that any wedge driven between Hamza and Landhaur will bring ruin to them both.

Landhaur's career as an Indian dastan hero is thus a spectacular one. He grows from being one vague king among many — as he was in Iran — into a figure of unique vividness, power, nobility, and intimacy with Hamza. Landhaur rides an Indian elephant, commands an Indian army, and has an Indian history. If Hamza is one half of a South Asian Muslim's heritage, Landhaur is the other.

APPENDIX

PASSAGE A: *Landhaur's renunciation*

Summoning the officers of the army, he said, 'Brothers, the wrath of the *Sāhib-qirān* has fallen on me. I now have neither any use for an army, nor any concern with wealth or property. I have renounced all military activity and prowess. Now all of you are to obey Farhād Khān Yakzarbī and Arshiyūn Parizād, and let no one ever neglect their orders. Always accompany both my sons.'

And to Farhād Khān Yakzarbī and Arshiyūn Parizād he said, 'Beware — never transgress the bounds of obedience and submission to the revered Amīr Hamza, the *Sāhib-qirān* of the Age! Remain always in auspicious attendance upon him, like slaves with rings in their ears in token of servitude. If you disobey my command, I will not lie quiet in my grave, and on the Day of Judgment I will seize hold of you and accuse you!' Both of Landhaur's sons began to weep and said, 'What is this that you are commanding!' Landhaur said, 'Do what I tell you. Tears are of no use; I have confided you to God's care.'

The officers of Landhaur's army petitioned, 'Lord and Master, why are you renouncing the world? The Provider of the Universe has made you master of a fierce army of eleven hundred thousand horsemen and foot-soldiers. Go back to your realm of Hindustan and reign there — defeat armies, subjugate lands!' Landhaur said, 'No doubt all this is possible. But by God, I prefer serving the *Sāhib-qirān* of the Age over everything else. Now, having left the service of the revered Amīr, I will not pursue power or kingship or military activity or prowess. My life is a burden to me. Enough, now I am through with soldiering, I will wander as a faqir for a little while and then die. Do you think I will remain alive much longer?'

At this distressing speech of Landhaur's, tumult broke out in the camp. The sound of weeping and lamenting arose among the army. Everyone began to cry aloud and sob, a dismal and mournful confusion arose. Landhaur removed all his arms — helmet, coat of mail, and gloves, and inner coat of mail, and visor and chain mail and spear and sword, musket and bow and arrow and dagger and axe. He loaded all this on his elephant Maimūna Mubāarak and said 'Oh Maimūna, now set out for the wilderness, I take leave of you now.' The elephant Maimūna Mubāarak, weeping heavy tears like a grey spring raincloud, set out for the wilderness.

Landhaur, taking leave of his sons and all the *'ayyārs* and the officers of the army, set out toward a fearsome wilderness. He picked up a handful of dust and put it on his head and rubbed it on his face, and tore open his collar; wrapping an ochre-coloured cloth around him, he assumed the dress of a faqir and began to wander in the wilderness.

PASSAGE B: *The final encounter*

Wounded as he was, Landhaur was in a dire state, covered with dust and blood. Writhing in pain, he managed to reach the revered Amīr. He put his gashed and bloody head on the feet of the revered Amīr. The Amīr removed his feet from under Landhaur's head. Landhaur sometimes lost consciousness, and sometimes grew conscious again. Outside, the champions were fighting sword-battles, infidels were being killed, and the Amīr's champions too were being wounded.

Landhaur regained consciousness. With a convulsive effort he fell on the Amīr's feet. There was no colour at all in his face, and his eyes were glazed. A wounded man always feels very thirsty. With his dry tongue protruding from his lips, he made a sign for water. But at such a time how could there be any water? He could only run his dry tongue over his lips.

But in that extremity, he folded his hands and petitioned the revered Amīr, 'Oh bestower of crowns upon sultans, cherisher of the poor and lowly, Christ of the generation, Messiah of the age, Hamza, *Sāhib-qirān*, now in my last hour I come before you! Pardon my error, forgive my sin. I have but a moment to live, my last breath is on my lips, the Angel of

Death stands before me. I want to travel lightly into death. Now is the time for you to look kindly upon your slave. I was not able to fulfil the demands of faithfulness — forgive my fault. This slave now sacrifices his life in Your Excellency's service.

This old family servant now dies
This slave now offers up his life at your feet.'

With these words Landhaur groaned and shut his eyes, his face grew even paler.

When the revered Amīr, having heard all these words of humility and submission, turned his gaze on Landhaur bin Sa'dān, the river of love burst forth, and tears began to fall. Those lustrous pearl-drops fell on Landhaur's face. Landhaur bin Sa'dān opened his eyes from his faint and gazed intently at the radiant face of the revered Amīr. At this moment the Amīr lost control, he gave a cry and wanted to embrace Landhaur. But there were fetters on his hands, he was helpless. Landhaur again gazed with half-open eyes at the Sāhib-qirān of the Age.

The Amīr in anguish wrenched at the fetters. The fetters broke. Hamza the Sāhib-qirān of the Age tenderly and lovingly pressed the head of Landhaur bin Sa'dān against his breast, and began saying, 'Oh my faithful friend, oh my heroic champion, don't leave your Amīr yet and set off for the land of Death! Alas, a hundred thousands times alas — what revolution of the crookedly turning spheres is this, that I see you in this desperate state and helpless condition!'

The revered Amīr kept saying this, and letting fall tears of passionate grief from his loving eyes, until 'Amar came up and said, 'Oh Amīr, for God's sake break your bonds! All the renowned champions have already been wounded. Karab, Asad, Hāshim the Sword-wielder, etc., are fighting. I fear that some shameless one might strike a blow, you might be wounded, and this wounded one — Landhaur, I mean — would be finished off.'

'Amar was still speaking these words when two worthless rascals ran in with drawn swords to kill the revered Amīr. The Amīr was enraged; he immediately burst his bonds and flung them aside, and rested Landhaur's head on the ground, and hurled himself on the two rascals. Seizing one in each hand, he picked them up, cracked their heads together, and flung them down to the floor, so that their bones were smashed and both reprobates were mingled with the dust.

'Amar ran to give the Amīr a sword. The Amīr began to fight. He struck some and killed some, picked others up and hurled them into the air and dismembered them with his sword as they fell, tore some cowards apart and flung them aside. A tremendous turmoil arose, like a novel Doomsday.

NOTES

¹ R. Russell, 'The development of the modern novel in Urdu', T. W. Clark, ed., in *The*

novel in India: its birth and development (London 1970), pp. 106-7.

² W. H. Hanaway, *Persian popular romances before the Safavid period* (Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation, 1970).

³ D. M. Lang and G. M. Meredith-Owens, 'Amiran-Darejaniani; a Georgian romance and its English rendering', *BSOAS*, XXII, 3 (1959) pp. 471-4.

⁴ P. S. van Ronkel, *De roman van Amir Hamza* (Leiden 1895).

⁵ Q. A. Mannan, *The emergence and development of Dobhasi literature in Bengal* (Dacca 1966), pp. 79-133.

⁶ J. Shi'ar, ed., *Qissa-e Hamza* (Teheran 1968-9), vol. 1, p. 113.

⁷ I owe this and many other observations about the Persian romance to Professor William L. Hanaway of the University of Pennsylvania, who discussed the story with me and most kindly lent me his own copy of the *Qissa-e Hamza*.

⁸ I owe these references, and the translations, to my long-time collaborator Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, who has given me a great deal of help at every stage of my dastan work.

⁹ V. S. Agrawala, 'Lindhaur Dev of Hamzah Namah: an identification', in H. R. Gupta, ed., *Essays presented to Sir Jadunath Sarkar* (Hoshiarpur 1958), vol. 2, pp. 20-22. I thank Professor Hanaway for this reference.

¹⁰ 'Abdullāh Bilgrāmi, *Dāstān-e Amīr Hamza* (Lucknow 1969). This version was first published in 1871 and has been kept in print ever since; it was based on an earlier version by Ghālib Lakhnavī (Calcutta 1855).

¹¹ Landhaur's Qāf-born son is named Arshiyūn; he also has an earth-born son, Farhād.

¹² G. C. Jain, *Urdū kī nasrī dāstāneḥ*, 2nd edn (Karachi 1969), pp. 470-90.

¹³ One is, however, being put together on microfilm and is almost complete. It is housed in the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago, as part of the South Asia Microform Project (SAMP) collection.

¹⁴ T. Husain, *Bālā bāxtar*, 2nd edn (Lucknow 1900), pp. 301-30. I thank S. R. Faruqi for pointing out this episode to me, and for commenting on my draft translation of it.

¹⁵ 'Sāhib-qirān' [Lord of the Conjunction] is a title referring to Hamza's birth at an astrologically auspicious moment; it is taken seriously as a sign of his special destiny.