

CHAPTER SIX: SĀRAṄGĀ SADĀVRĪJ

Long live the story hearer, long live the story teller.
The story is not true, the story is not false.
Now all brothers please be silent, don't fidget,
taste the flavor of the story.
The qissa is thus: One day it happened that Gorakhnāth,
circumambulating the earth, came to a city called
Chandrapur....¹

We have now looked at several single-source qissas, works with contents that can be predicted merely by glancing at their covers, works which (precisely or crudely) reproduce a single established text. At the opposite extreme are works like **Sāraṅgā Sadāvriḥ**, published in versions of widely differing length, in versions entirely verse or mostly prose, in versions which disagree on the most basic points. **Sāraṅgā Sadāvriḥ** will be our first example of a varying qissa, a work which not only changes over time, but also exists in multiple contemporary versions.

Sāraṅgā Sadāvriḥ compels our attention for another reason as well. We have noted the extraordinary popularity of **Qissā totā mainā**, of which 264,600 copies, in 94 editions, were published over roughly forty years--according to the definitely under-representative S.A.M.P. publication records. But the same records yield figures of 320,940 copies, in 133 editions, for **Sāraṅgā Sadāvriḥ**. Appendix A contains the full list of editions, together with the number of pages in each, so that the diversity of the various versions can clearly be seen. It appears from the S.A.M.P. records that **Sāraṅgā Sadāvriḥ** was almost never published in Urdu. But I have acquired one unrecorded Urdu edition, and there were undoubtedly others. Urdu editions, though not numerous, do exist today; Appendix B provides examples.

As we will see in the course of this chapter, **Sāraṅgā Sadāvriḥ** is an unusual qissa: it takes passionate illicit love as its central theme, and it uses metrical forms more extensively and systematically than do other qissas. To verify its ascribed generic identity, therefore, I have identified in Appendix A those editions which include the word "qissa" in the title itself. The unmarked editions include no generic description, with only four exceptions: one described as "**vārtā**" (Calcutta 1931), a term frequently used to label prose passages which are interspersed among metrical forms, and three as "**gīt**" (Calcutta 1932, Gaya 1933, Calcutta 1944), a general term meaning "song" which is applied to many kinds of printed verse works. There may be some regional tradition here: of the editions I have examined, the term "**gīt**" is used in Calcutta by three publishers, in Varanasi by two, and in Kanpur by one--but only once in Delhi. Surprisingly, there is no discernible correlation between the proportion of verse in the edition, and the use of either "**gīt**" or "qissa" to describe it. No edition I have examined uses "**vārtā**" alone; two--one in Calcutta, one in Varanasi--use it as a subtitle in addition to "**gīt**."

Three entries in the S.A.M.P. records refer to editions of the story described as "**sāṅgīt**" (Jabalpur 1915, Varanasi 1925, Kanpur 1932). **Sāṅgīt** is a special genre, a form of

¹Version O, p. 2. For convenient reference, the main editions of **Sāraṅgā Sadāvriḥ** to be discussed in this chapter have been assigned letters from A to Q. Full bibliographical information on all seventeen of these versions will be found in Appendix B.

folk-opera about which we will have more to say in the next chapter. These three editions have not been included in Appendix A, but may be found in the listings in Appendix B. They show that while **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** may have been performed (or at least prepared for performance) as a folk-opera, it was never a common or popular one. I have never found such a **sāṅgīt** version of the story.

Sāraṅgā and Sadāvrij are lovers, and their story goes far back in folk tradition. Their names have evolved over time: from Sāvālīṅgā to Sālīṅgā to Sāraṅgā,² from Sadayvats or Sadevant or Sadayvachchh to Salaivrikṣh or Sadāvrikṣh or Sadāvrij. Pārashurām Chaturvedī maintains that their story has been popular in Multan since at least the early eleventh century; he traces its earliest Gujarati version back to about 1410. This version, the poet Bhīm's **Sadayvats vīr prabaṅdh**, has been published; its editor, M. Majumdar, also puts its date of composition at about 1410, though not all scholars agree.³ There were other fifteenth-century versions as well--most notably the poet Harṣhavarddhana's Sanskrit verse work **Sadayavatsacharitra**, which has been assigned such dates as 1453 or 1470.⁴ But as we will see, the modern qissa versions seem to be much closer to later Rajasthani versions than to these earliest texts.

Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij in its modern form is almost the limit case of a varying qissa. In the course of my research I have been able to examine thirty-five different editions of the story, ranging in length from 20 pages to 147 pages, ranging in date from 1896 (or possibly earlier, in the case of undated versions) to the present [1978]. The earliest dated text of which I am aware is from 1890.⁵ The thirty-five editions I have examined represent seventeen different versions--since some of them, though published by different firms or in different formats, are sentence-for-sentence and almost word-for-word identical.

All these seventeen versions make it clear that by the standards of their society, Sāraṅgā and Sadāvrij are not meant for each other. All versions agree that Sāraṅgā is the daughter of a merchant, and Sadāvrij the son of a raja. Moreover, in the course of the story Sāraṅgā marries someone else, while Sadāvrij may already have other wives; sometimes he too marries someone else in the course of the story. Yet the lovers live only for each other, and at length are united, apparently forever. Their passion and suffering end not in death but in union--a union, moreover, blessed with worldly happiness, royal power, and societal acceptance.

This successful illicit passion makes **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** unique in qissa literature. Most qissas retain the Urdu dastan vision of love as one kind of adventure among many, and of the beloved as an object of quest--and often a secondary object, at that. Love in the dastan world is a straightforward, cut-and-dried process which always leads to marriage; it may evoke strong desires, but they are simple ones, and easily satisfied. Only **Lailā Majnūn** among the perennials

²The word "sāraṅgā," which is well-known as the name of a **rāg** or musical mode, is a logical end-point for such evolution.

³Pārashurām Chaturvedī, **Bhāratīya premākhyān kā paramparā** (Delhi: Rājkamal Prakāshan, 1956), pp. 74-76; Mañjulāl Majumdar, ed., **Sadayvats vīr prabaṅdh, kavi Bhīm virachit** (Bikaner: Shri Sādul Rajasthani Research Institute, 1961), p. o; Badrī Prasād Sakariyā, "Madhyakālīn Gujarātī sāhitya meṅ Sadayvats kathā," **Rājasthān Bhāratī** 10 (March 1968):73.

⁴Bhāradvāj, **Madhyakālīn romāṅs**, p. 129; Rāmgoṣāl Goyal, **Rājasthānī ke premākhyān: paramparā aur pragatī** (Jaipur: Rājasthān Prakāshan, 1969), p. 14.

⁵**Kissā Sālīṅgā aur Salebrīkṣh kā**, by Bhedī Rām (Delhi, 1890, 56 p., Hindi). Mentioned in Blumhardt, **A Supplementary Catalogue of Hindi Books in the British Museum, Acquired During the Years 1893-1912**, col. 41.

is concerned with love as the defining, all-absorbing obsession of the lovers' lives. And this classic of Islamic story tradition brings the lovers to transcendent fulfillment only through worldly ruin, disgrace, and death. Successful illicit love is much more common in North Indian narrative tradition,⁶ but the stories in which it appears have never been popular as qissas. Qissas of the "outer layer" deal with adulterous love, but less as a passion than as a setting for ingenious trickery and intrigue.

Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij itself attempts to justify this triumph of illicit passion by ascribing it to the operation of marvelous and irresistible forces. Above all, the lovers win through to each other because their union has been predestined by events in an earlier birth. In one form or another, this prior-birth explanation is present in every version of the story. The number of earlier births varies greatly--one, two, six, eight, nineteen--in different versions. Not only human births, but births in animal form as well are included, favorites being swans, monkeys, jackals, and pigeons. To understand the diversity of different versions of the story, let us look at some of the introductory earlier-birth stories which account for Sāraṅgā and Sadāvrij's guilty, stubborn, triumphant love.

Seven versions of the story begin when Guru Gorakhnāth, a powerful yogi with an important place in North Indian story tradition, encounters a pair of swans, and gives them a boon.

In ancient times the auspicious Guru Gorakhnāth, wandering lost in meditation on the Supreme Lord, came to the shore of the lake Mānasarovar. In that lake a pair of swans were playing in the water. When their gaze fell upon him, the female said to her mate, "Let go of me now, because Guru Gorakhnāth has come here, no telling how his attention might be drawn. He is a very virtuous holy man, who is easily pleased and easily displeased." When these words fell on the ear of Guru Gorakhnāth, he was pleased, and gave a boon to both: "You are very virtuous and modest. Therefore, having left this body, take on a human body, and enjoy yourselves in happiness." Having said this, he seized a fruit and threw it, so that the male flew away, and the female remained sitting there, unhappy. Having seen that she was unhappy, Gorakhnāth said, "If you are sad at the boon, then go, leave this body and take on a beautiful form. Your mate will take on human form at the proper time, you search for him." Gorakhnāth went away, and the female swan at that moment became a beautiful woman. Having seen her naked body, she was embarrassed, and sat down in the lake. At that time a raja, out hunting, came there.

When his glance fell on that pool, having seen her he became enchanted.

The raja takes her to his palace, and wishes to marry her. She puts him off, and send out bird-catchers who eventually bring her mate. But the male swan dies of grief over her changed form, and she dies of grief at his death. The raja dies of grief at her death. The three are then reborn as Sadāvrij, Sāraṅgā, and Sāraṅgā's future husband Rūpā.⁷

Second most common of the explanatory earlier-birth stories is that of the Parī Rambhā, who rashly smuggles her mortal lover into the world of Raja Indra. She turns her lover

⁶For various examples see Bhāradvāj, **Madhyakālīn romāṅs**; Goyal, **Rājasthānī ke premākhyān**; and Nityānand Tivārī, **Madhyayugīn romāṅchak ākhyān**; **Lorikāyan ke maukḥik aur likhit pāṭhrūp par ādhārit** (Delhi: National Publishing House, 1970).

⁷Version A, pp. 2-5. Also found in versions E, G, K, L, M, N.

into a bee, and conceals him in her bosom. But his presence makes her dancing less skillful than usual, and Raja Indra becomes suspicious. He applies magic water to the bee.

The moment the water was sprinkled on that bee, it left its bee appearance and was changed into its true form. Having seen this, Raja Indra's brows were bent in anger, and he roared to Surajbhān, "Oh Man, who are you?" Having heard this, Surajbhān, with his hands joined and his head bowed, humbly said, "Oh Maharaj! I am the son of the merchant Lakṣhmīnārāyaṇ of Kanchanpur, and this slave's name is Surajbhān. With Rambhā's aid, I have come here to have the merit of seeing you." Having heard these words of Surajbhān's, Raja Indra's eyes grew red. And he rebuked Rambhā: "Oh Rambhā, you, a Parī of Indra's throne, have gone to the mortal world and taken your pleasure with a man, therefore you are no longer worthy of living in the world of Indra. All right, now receive my curse, both of you--go, in the mortal world take on the bodies of jackals and emerge from the womb of a jackal, because you both have tricked me. Therefore my curse to you both is that for seven births you will not be destined to enjoy each other, and even if you try to enjoy each other your efforts will be vain and fruitless, and for seven births you will wander, longing for union."

This Rambha-mortal birth story is often found as a sequel to one of the other explanatory earlier-birth stories, thus doubly motivating the pair's desperate love.⁸

In the third common earlier-birth explanation, found in three versions, the human birth as Sāraṅgā and Sadāvrij, though technically a boon, represents merely the continuation of an earlier human love.

They say that once in the city of Ambavati lived a Brahman named Sadāsukhlāl. His wife Sukhmanā was very delicate, as dear as life, as valuable as nine cities, brilliant in form, abode of all virtues, devoted to her husband. Sadāsukhlāl loved her so much that he could scarcely live even a moment without her, and leaving all his work, remained drowned in the stream of her love twenty-four hours a day. She too was devoted to her husband, and was never averse to her husband's commands. Now their love became known to the whole city. Everyone felt it improper to put any obstacle in the path of their love, and began to help them. Everyone took charge of providing their food and drink. Now both, having passed their youth in this enjoyment, reached old age. After some time, death tormented them. Now neither of these two would die without the other. At this time Gorakhnāth came, and having seen this love of theirs, gave a boon: "Go, you will receive this human body again." Then, having heard these words of Gorakhnāth, these two gave up their bodies.⁹

Another explanation, which also involves Gorakhnāth and a virtuous human couple, occurs with some variation in three turn-of-the-century versions.

One day it happened that Gorakhnāth, circumambulating the earth, came to a city called Chandrapur. When he saw there a very beautiful garden, different kinds of temples, an ocean of rest all around, he sat down and began to perform austerities and repeat mantras. Agharṇāth came; having prostrated himself he went to the city of Chandrapur. He called for alms at each house, and wandered from door

⁸Version H, pp. 14-15. Also found in versions B, C, E, G, I, Q.

⁹Version D, pp. 1-2. Also found in versions F and Q.

to door, but no one gave him grain. On the edge of the city a potter lived. When poor Augharnāth called out at his door, he came and prostrated himself before him and said, “Please come in, Maharaj, and sit down. Please take whatever things you need, and have your meal.” Augharnāth said, “Oh child, be happy. Through your grace, there has been peace. Abandon this city, and go settle in some other city. The moment you leave, a kind of fire will start in this city that won’t go out, even when they try to extinguish it. And when you go out, don’t look back; otherwise, you’ll turn into a monkey.” Having heard Augharnāth’s words, the potter and his wife went out of the city. The moment they left, fire started in the city, and tumult and commotion began. Having heard the noise, the potter and his wife stood still, and began to watch the spectacle. As they watched the spectacle, the potter became a male monkey, and his wife, a female monkey. Moving on by stages, eating and drinking new things, they passed the night in a banyan tree on the banks of the river Narbadā. In that tree lived a pair of swans. The female swan said to her mate, “Look, these poor creatures, stricken by misfortune, have settled here. Tell some qissa that will help them pass the night, and as soon as it is morning they will move on.” The male swan said, “Look, these two poor things are sleeping, tired from travel. Leave them alone, and be still. But there is an omen that whoever, at this moment and this conjunction of stars, bathes in the Narbadā, will leave his body and become a youth of twelve years. By now only a little of the time is left.” The moment she heard this, the female monkey leaped into the Narbadā; the male monkey was left staring after her. The female monkey became a fresh young girl of twelve years...

Eventually she too is found by a raja who takes her home as his queen. But the male monkey dies of grief; she stabs herself at his death; the raja stabs himself at her death. Then follows the Sāraṅgā-Sadāvrij birth, with the raja returning as Sāraṅgā’s husband Rūpā.¹⁰ Although this episode does not occur as an introductory explanation in any modern version, a variation of it occurs as an intermediate birth in several modern multi-birth editions. In all these versions, the couple give alms to Gorakhnāth, and are then put to death by the wicked, miserly raja of their city.¹¹

In another modern version, the swan pair reappear, this time rewarded by Shiv and Pārvatī--not for piety, but for unselfish love. In the burning heat of summer a pair of swans come to a small hollow which holds only a very little water. Neither will drink before the other.

In this way, telling each other to drink, it came about that both became desperate with thirst. Their love was so much that without letting each other drink they didn’t want to drink themselves. First, thirst; second, the violent sun--in this way because of thirst both drew their last breath, and couldn’t drink water....

And when Shiv awoke, Pārvatī told him the whole qissa, and began to insist, “Maharaj, go and give both birds the boon of life, so that their love can be restored....”

Even when Shiv reasoned with her a gret deal, Pārvatī remained stubborn. It has been said--In the world the will of woman, son, and raja is always victorious. Finally the matter was decided on this condition: “If they are revived,

¹⁰Version O, pp. 2-8. Also found in versions J and P.

¹¹Versions B, birth 4; H, birth 4; I, birth 6.

Brahma's rule will be thrown into confusion. I will give these swans this boon, that in every birth they will take birth in one caste and one city, and their loving relationship will always continue. Even if by fate they are not born in one city and one caste, even then the dastan of their love will always remain fruitful and flowering."¹²

The diversity of these introductory episodes shows how differently the love of Sāraṅgā and Sadāvrij has been conceived. Their love goes against the grain of societal judgment; it perseveres through suffering, deceit, and struggle--and leads to triumphant union. Such love must be the fruit of a special curse--or of a special blessing. The various versions agree that some marvelous influence has been at work, but differ greatly about its nature.

When we examine the birth as Sāraṅgā and Sadāvrij, the fated culmination of so many previous births, we at first find large areas of agreement among the various versions. Sadāvrij is the son of a Raja of Attock, Sāraṅgā the daughter of the wealthy merchant Padam Shāh (or Padam Sāhū) of that city. Their love begins in childhood--at school, if not before.

Now these two began to be raised with great love and affection. A person takes years to grow up; they grew up in days. When their age was seven years, then the Raja sent the Prince, and the merchant sent Sāraṅgā, to a school to study. In a matter of days Sadāvrij was captivated, and Sāraṅgā's gaze too began to rest on him. Both began to be overwhelmed by the flow of the ocean of love. In this way many days passed....They turned away from reading and writing, and ran free on the path of love. Then their teacher found this out, and called a tailor and told him to prepare a curtain such that one couldn't see the other. When Sāraṅgā heard this, she went and gave five gold mohars to the tailor, and said,

“Oh tailor's son, shall I call you ‘brother,’ or ‘hero’?

Put a window, so that you won't cause the pain of separation.”

Greed is a great evil. The tailor, having rejected the teacher's word under the influence of greed, made it just as Sāraṅgā wanted. In that way both kept watering the vine of love. The teacher had a garden. His custom was that one boy and one girl went every day to water the garden. It happened that one day the turn of Sadāvrikṣh and Sāraṅgā to care for the garden came. Then they went joyfully to the teacher's garden....

The two engage in a long verse conversation full of suggestive remarks about the ripe and unripe fruits, and provocative allusions to the sexual enjoyment they plan for the future. In some versions one or two birds join in the teasing conversation.

In this way, chatting joyfully and playfully and strolling in the garden, evening came. Then they spread banana leaves under a lime tree, placed a sword between them, and went to sleep. And they slept so deeply that it became morning.¹³

When their teacher discovers what has occurred, he declares their education complete and sends them both home. Sāraṅgā is at once betrothed to Rūpā, a young man from the city of Dhārānagar.¹⁴

¹²Version I, pp. 6-9.

¹³Version D, pp. 3-5, 7.

¹⁴Attock is near Peshawar, in Pakistan, while Dhārānagar, or Dhar, is near Ujjain, in Madhya Pradesh. An inconvenient distance for a marriage; but the qissa landscape is a flexible one.

On these facts sixteen out of the seventeen versions studied agree.¹⁵ But from this point on, the agreement abruptly ends. Broadly speaking, the story from here on takes one of two different directions. The first direction, which we may call the marriage-breaking plot, is contained in nine versions of the story, printed in twenty separate editions. According to the marriage-breaking plot in its most popular version, several significant events happen before Sāraṅgā's marriage. There is the episode of the necklace, which occurs when the lovers meet by chance at a pool where both have gone to bathe.

In the meantime, a kite seized Sāraṅgā's necklace, and left it in a sambhar tree.

When Sāraṅgā saw this, she began to cry. Then Sadāvṛiṣh quickly climbed that tree....Having brought the necklace, he put it on his loved one's neck. From there they went to their own homes.

Soon afterwards, Sadāvṛij, with his friend, the chief minister's son, is sent off on an errand by his father to keep him out of the way while Sāraṅgā is married. But Sadāvṛij and his friend join the wedding procession.

Now when the procession reached the bride's door, fireworks began to be released.

In this confusion Sadāvṛij reined his horse in at the merchant's door, and behind him the minister's son did likewise. Having seen thousands of men standing around in groups like members of the procession, the merchant was deceived and gave the **ṭikā** to Prince Sadāvṛij.

The bride's father thus applies the ceremonial dot to Sadāvṛij's forehead instead of the bridegroom's. And Sadāvṛij anticipates the bridegroom in the next ceremony as well: the **charḥāvā**, in which the bridegroom places a necklace on the bride's neck. Sadāvṛij has brought his mother's necklace.

Having arrived at the pavilion, he sat down where Sāraṅgā would pass and began to recite verses. In the meantime, Sāraṅgā's bridesmaid brought her to sit in the central area. Avoiding being seen, he put the necklace worth nine hundred thousand on her neck. Then Sāraṅgā knew, and feeling shy, sat looking at him.

Later, the lovers even manage a private meeting, when Sāraṅgā makes her way secretly to Sadāvṛij's camp by night. He gives her his dagger. The next day, during the wedding ceremony, she makes the first circumambulation of the sacred fire while secretly carrying Sadāvṛij's dagger.¹⁶

After the wedding, Sāraṅgā and her entourage set out for Dhārānagar. En route, she calls a halt in order to worship at a temple of the Goddess. There by prearrangement Sadāvṛij awaits her, disguised as a yogi and carrying a caged parrot. But he has fallen into a deep sleep (which some versions ascribe to opium) from which she cannot awaken him. Disconsolate, she talks with the parrot, and (in most versions) writes a verse message on her sleeping lover's palm. When Sadāvṛij awakes, he is miserable at having missed her; his parrot encourages him, and he sets out for Dhārānagar.

In Dhārānagar, he poses as a yogi, and comes to beg alms from Sāraṅgā; they are able to arrange a meeting. At midnight, she lowers a rope and he climbs to her window--bringing a dead snake, for Sāraṅgā has a plan. The next day, she sets fire to a cotton storehouse, and in the resulting confusion pretends to have been fatally bitten by the snake. When her body

¹⁵The exception: version J.

¹⁶Version D, pp. 10-16. The marriage-breaking plot is also found in versions B, C, F, G, H, I, K, Q.

is taken to the burning-ground, Sadāvrīj, disguised as a terrifying demon, frightens the relatives into abandoning the corpse. The lovers are united at last, and relax under a tree.

But while Sadāvrīj again sleeps his deep sleep, Sāraṅgā is kidnapped by Raja Giland, who has passed by while hunting and become infatuated with her. Cleverly breaking her necklace, she leaves a trail of pearls which Sadāvrīj later follows. She puts off Raja Giland by promising to marry him after he has built her a palace. Sadāvrīj finds work as a laborer building the palace; at length he reveals his true identity. Raja Giland repents, and accepts the pair as a married couple. The two live happily together from then on. In a few versions they are restored to the court of Raja Indra, whose curse has now expired.

The above summary includes the main features of the marriage-breaking plot. We have seen how the **charḥāvā**, the bridegroom's putting a necklace on the bride, is anticipated by the episode at the pool when Sadāvrīj replaces on Sāraṅgā's neck the necklace which the kite had stolen. And the marriage ceremonies themselves are tampered with: Sadāvrīj receives the ceremonial **ṭikā** from the bride's father, secretly performs the **charḥāvā** by putting his own mother's necklace on Sāraṅgā first, and has Sāraṅgā carry his dagger as she circumambulates the sacred fire. By all these devices, Sāraṅgā's marriage to Rūpā is vitiated--though only in the lovers' eyes, since most of the counter-measures are secret. But the lovers are resolved to be together at all costs; Sāraṅgā's "death" from snakebite and her burning of her inlaws' property mark the end of her marriage and the severance of all allegiance to her husband and his family. Her marriage has been violently and absolutely broken.

The other main plot, the marriage-doubling plot, is found in four versions,¹⁷ printed in twelve separate editions. It tends to be longer, more obscure, and more metrical than the marriage-breaking plot. It agrees with the marriage-breaking plot about Sāraṅgā and Sadāvrīj's escapades as schoolchildren: love at an early age, the curtain with the hole cut in it, their prolonged stay in the teacher's garden.

After their schooling, Sāraṅgā's marriage is at once arranged, with Rūpā (or Rūp Shāh), the son of Raja Lakṣhmansen of Dhārānagar.¹⁸ And the marriage is celebrated with appropriate pomp and ritual correctness. Sāraṅgā then tells Rūpā she must worship the Goddess before consummating the marriage; instead she goes secretly to the royal palace to find Sadāvrīj. But he is deep in an opium sleep; unable to awaken him, she talks with his parrot, and writes a message on his palm. Returning, she tells Rūpā that the Goddess has not accepted her offering, but demands a new temple in Dhārānagar before Sāraṅgā may consummate the marriage. Rupa and his party, taking Sāraṅgā, return to Dhārānagar.

When Sadāvrīj awakes, he talks with his parrot. When his wife Brahmāde questions him about the marks on his palm, he tells her of his love, and despite her urgent pleas refuses to renounce Sāraṅgā. After a lengthy argument, he assembles his nobles, ostensibly for a hunt. They set out for Dhārānagar, and on the way meet a mysterious old woman who prophesies their success. At Dhārānagar, they bribe the gardener-woman to let them camp in the royal garden; for an additional bribe she takes a special flower-garland, containing a letter, to Sāraṅgā. Sāraṅgā replies through her maid, Sujānī.

With the alibi of the Goddess' demand for a new temple, Sāraṅgā continues to keep her husband at arm's length. The two while away the time playing chess, the board game

¹⁷Versions A, L, M. N.

¹⁸Sāraṅgā is a merchant's daughter: Rūpā as a raja's son should be just as improper a husband for her as Sadāvrīj would be. But this difference in caste never becomes an issue in the story.

chaupar, and other games--all of which Sāraṅgā wins. And repeatedly she sends for Sadāvrij, but the lovers are repeatedly thwarted. On their first attempt, Sāraṅgā sets fire to a wing of the palace, as a diversionary tactic, and slips out to meet Sadāvrij in the garden; but a monkey throws a mango at Sadāvrij, then a bird drops a dead snake, etc., disrupting their lovemaking. On their second attempt, Sadāvrij comes disguised as a woman; but Sujānī, keeping watch, accidentally gives the alarm, and Sāraṅgā hastily lets Sadāvrij down from her window with a rope. The third attempt also involves Sadāvrij in female disguise, a false alarm, and a hasty escape by rope. A fourth attempt is frustrated when the Raja himself overhears the lovers' conversation.

Next Sadāvrij comes disguised as a yogi, and asks alms of Sāraṅgā. She prepares pearls to give as alms, but is so absorbed in talking that she does not even notice when a wild swan eats them. When the yogi leaves, she faints. Her in-laws observe all this, and there is a great commotion. Sadāvrij comes later, again in yogi dress, and speaks to Sāraṅgā at her window. The Raja hears them, and asks Sadāvrij who he is. Sadāvrij identifies himself as the son of the Raja of Attock, and says he is on a hunting trip. The Raja is delighted to have the son of such a powerful raja as a guest. After deliberating, he decides to marry his daughter Ratan Kuñvarī to Sadāvrij. The wedding is duly performed; after it is consummated, Sadāvrij placates Ratan Kuñvarī and sends her to her own rooms.

Then, quite openly, he sends for Sāraṅgā; since he is now a powerful in-law, they bring her to him. The lovers enjoy their union to the fullest, and remain together overnight. The next day Sadāvrij sets out with his entourage, returning with his new bride Ratan Kuñvarī to Attock. Auspicious omens are seen. Rūpā accompanies him a little way, then turns back. Sāraṅgā remains with Sadāvrij. In version L, the version I have been following most closely, it has taken sixty-five pages to reach this point of the lovers' union. The remaining forty-seven pages of the text are concerned with the lovers' fight to justify their irregular liaison, and to win its acceptance by their society.

On the road to Attock, they meet the same mysterious old woman. Sadāvrij falls at her feet, and she blesses him and confirms his good fortune. Sāraṅgā laments her disgraced condition, and the old woman comforts her with the promise of a happy life with Sadāvrij. Ratan Kuñvarī in her turn is advised to conciliate Sāraṅgā, and consoled with the promise of a son who will rule. The lovers also converse with a **koyal** and three other birds, defending their love against the birds' condemnation.

When they reach the palace at Attock, Sāraṅgā and Ratan, and their two maids Sujānī and Shubhchintak, exchange insults. The next day, the senior wife, Brahmāde, comes to meet Ratan. All three women, and Sujānī, begin to quarrel. When Sadāvrij returns after holding court, he angrily orders them to stop quarreling and to accept Sāraṅgā as paramount among them. Brahmāde pleads with him, in the two longest speeches in the qissa, to return to his legitimate wives, and avoid a disgraceful and dangerous scandal. He refuses, invoking the power of fate and mentioning other famous lovers. After further argument, in which Sāraṅgā also takes part, Brahmāde retires to her own palace. This scene is the longest in the work, and clearly an emotional high point.

Next, Sadāvrij confronts his father, who reproaches him as a bad son who has brought disgrace to the family. He replies soothingly, blaming fate, describing his liaison as a *fait accompli* which will work out in the long run. Finally the Raja is placated, and blesses him. But in the meantime, Padam Shāh has returned to Attock with his caravan. Hearing of his daughter's behavior, he faints; then he calls all the merchants together. He resolves to leave the

city, and they decide to accompany him. When the Raja learns of their plan, he is greatly upset. He pacifies Padam Shāh by symbolically “banishing” Sadāvrij to the palace garden. But the real peacemaker is Padam Shāh’s son’s wife (Sāraṅgā’s sister-in-law), who communicates with Sadāvrij in his garden through messages tied around a parrot’s neck, and by a series of delicate persuasions conciliates everyone. Sadāvrij is recalled from “banishment,” and restored to full favor and royal power.

Sadāvrij then plans a hunt, and takes all three women with him, on separate elephants. He explains to his accompanying nobles that he wishes to show the women to the people, and win their acceptance. As the procession passes through the city, Sadāvrij exchanges bantering remarks with several ladies of noble family who praise his beauty and criticize his behavior; he responds with justifications. The hunt itself is spectacular and successful, and reinforces the harmony between Sadāvrij and his nobles. Later, as the party are resting, a female **koyal** bird speaks. A conversation ensues among Sadāvrij, his three women, Sujānī, and the bird, in which the **koyal** expresses more leniency toward the lovers than other birds had shown. Then Sadāvrij and his party ride back. Passing through the city, Sadāvrij again exchanges bantering remarks with various ladies; the tone is mellow and favorable. The party arrive at the palace. Sāraṅgā and Sujānī express their satisfaction.

This marriage-doubling plot is above all a story about the power of marriage and the family--and by extension, the power of society and public opinion. Thus Sāraṅgā’s marriage to Rūpā is never broken or denied; rather, Sāraṅgā works within it, using excuses to postpone consummation. The lovers repeatedly try to achieve union by meeting secretly--and repeatedly fail. They succeed only after Sadāvrij, through his wedding with Ratan, has married into Sāraṅgā’s family and thus gained access to her. After one marriage has parted the lovers, a second reunites them. And from then on, the lovers’ efforts to win acceptance for their liaison are the only subject matter of the story. They defend their love before a **koyal** bird, a mysterious old woman, three other birds, Sadāvrij’s wife, Sadāvrij’s father and his nobles, Sāraṅgā’s father and the other merchants, many women of the city, and one final **koyal** bird. While Brahmāde and Padam Shāh are enemies of their love, Sāraṅgā’s sister-in-law is their powerful ally. Sāraṅgā’s husband is conspicuous by his absence.¹⁹ The lovers argue and persuade and finally get their way; rather than denying the claims on them, they temporize, and conciliate the claimants.

The marriage-doubling plot makes a more sustained and systematic use of verse than does the marriage-breaking plot. While prose passages are generally in modern standard Hindi, the verse passages are older, more dialectical, more obscure.²⁰ Verse is used only for dialogue, never for any other purpose. And virtually all the important dialogue is in verse: prose dialogue is almost entirely confined to practical matters. Long verse dialogues are the heart of the marriage-doubling plot. The effect of their pre-eminence is to slow the development of the plot, and turn the story into a series of abrupt progressions from one luxuriant verse set-piece to another. It also tends to make the plot quite obscure.²¹

¹⁹The reader may be meant to understand, as K. C. Bahl has suggested, that Rūpā is impotent.

²⁰In fact a kind of deliberately cryptic verse called **gūṛh vachan** (hidden speech) is sometimes used--for example, in version L, p. 81.

²¹So obscure that the text of version A, which is seriously disordered and confused, has been printed in at least nine separate editions, apparently without its incoherence having been perceived.

Both the marriage-breaking and marriage-doubling plots are represented among the oldest (turn-of-the-century) qissa versions. And both have antecedents in Rajasthani versions of the story. An extreme form of marriage-breaking occurs in the poet Kisnā's **Sadaivachchh Sāvaliṅgā rī bāt** (1742).²² Sāraṅgā sends a disguised maidservant to take her place during the wedding ceremonies, and thus is never really married to Rūpā at all. Kisnā's text also includes accounts of seven previous births; among qissas, multi-birth accounts (i.e., those describing more than one previous birth) occur only in connection with the marriage-breaking plot.

And the marriage-doubling plot is not only present, but also more plausible in Rajasthani versions than it is in modern qissa form. For in both Kisnā's text and the poet Keshav's much earlier **Sadevachchh Sāvaliṅgā chaupāi** (1640),²³ the lovers are united only when Sadāvrij marries another princess and demands Sāraṅgā as his ceremonial gift (**kar mochan**) in lieu of dowry! Both these significant Rajasthani texts include other crucial features of the qissa versions: the lovers' escapades at school, their time in the teacher's garden, their meeting in the Goddess' temple, Sadāvrij's deep sleep, Sāraṅgā's message written on his hand. Many minor incidents show parallels as well.

The qissa has many points in common with other medieval North Indian romances, such as Jayasī's **Padmāvat**.²⁴ Like many such romances and tales, it maintains a consistent involvement with Guru Gorakhnāth as a powerful figure whose intervention in a previous birth affects the lovers' fate.²⁵ One edition ascribes to him "fourteen invisible followers and fourteen hundred visible ones"; another edition claims him as its author.²⁶ Guru Gorakhnāth is a common qissa *deus ex machina*, though rarely a central figure.²⁷

Four versions of **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** are eccentric, and do not fall into either main plot. Three of these four are turn-of-the-century editions from the Shyāmkāshī Press collection. In version J, Sadāvrij asks his father to marry him to Sāraṅgā, on the grounds that they were married in a previous birth. After much persuasion, his father reluctantly agrees. But when Sāraṅgā's father hears of it, he is so angry that he takes his family and leaves the city. Sadāvrij follows, placates him, and brings them back--after which Sāraṅgā is duly betrothed to a merchant.

A second highly idiosyncratic version, version O, features Jhilmilā Yogī, who turns Sāraṅgā into a bee, puts her into a box, and steals her away. Both Sadāvrij and Rūpā pursue her, but she obtains the yogi's magic book, puts it to good use, and virtually rescues herself. Later,

²²Goyal, **Rajasthānī ke premākhyān**, pp. 92-93, 191-194; Majumdar, **Sadayvats vīr prabaṅdh**, pp. da-va.

²³Goyal, **Rajasthānī ke premākhyān**, pp. 61-62, 191-194; Majumdar, **Sadayvats vīr prabaṅdh**, pp. ta-na.

²⁴P. Chaturvedī, **Bhāratīya premākhyān**, p. 78.

²⁵Of the seventeen versions examined, Gorakhnāth was featured in thirteen, and omitted from four (versions B, C, H, I). For an account of Gorakhnāth and other figures of the Nāth cult in story tradition, see Shashibhushan Das Gupta, **Obscure Religious Cults**, 3rd ed. (Calcutta: Firma K.L.M., 1969), especially Appendices B and C, pp. 367-391.

²⁶Version E, p. 2; **Kissa Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij chāroṅ bhāg**, by Guru Gorakhnāth (Varanasi: Hari Nārāyan Varmā Bookseller, 110 p., Hindi).

²⁷The exceptional **Kissā Kāmṛup kī rānī**, by Nihāl Chand Varmā (Varanasi: Hindi Prachārak Pustakālay, 30 p., Hindi), describes Gorakhnāth's rescue of his guru Machchhendranāth from the clutches of an alluring woman.

however, after she runs off with Sadāvrij, the two are constantly losing each other. First she is abducted by a Dev; later she and Sadāvrij become separated while wandering in a forest; another time they are parted through a shipwreck; then she is abducted by another Dev, and finally kidnapped by a merchant. But with the aid of Jhilmilā Yogī's magic book, the lovers are reunited at last and found their own city--Sāliṅgābād.

Version P, a third unorthodox version, is notable for its author, Pañḍit Rangīlāl of **Qissā totā mainā** fame. This version has affinities with the marriage-breaking plot, but differs from it in important ways: the marriage ceremony is never discredited or tampered with. In this version, Sāraṅgā's adventures continue even after her pretended "death": she and Sadāvrij are attacked by thieves, she is rescued by a local raja, and Sadāvrij is jailed as a thief. She fends off the advances of the raja's son, has Sadāvrij released, and runs off with him by night. It is one of Pañḍit Rangīlāl's weaker efforts.

In a more recent eccentric version, version E, a barber called Mohanā Nāi plays an important role. He comes to cut Sāraṅgā's nails, and faints at her beauty. Going next to cut Sadāvrij's nails, Mohanā describes Sāraṅgā, and displays the tiny parings of her exquisite nails which he has saved. Sadāvrij then contrives to see her, and both fall in love; they are teenagers at the time. Through Mohanā Nāi, Sadāvrij discovers the name of Sāraṅgā's school, and compels the reluctant teacher to admit him as a student. From that point on, the version follows the marriage-breaking plot.

The most recent editions of **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** reveal a continuing search for freshness, novelty, and originality, rather than any allegiance to established texts. The largest qissa publisher in Calcutta, introducing a massive twenty-birth edition, boasts:

No telling how many publishers have published **Rānī Sāraṅgā kā gīt**, and how many writers have written it. You must have been having difficulty over which **Rānī Sāraṅgā kā gīt** is good, accurate, interesting, sweet, and worth reading. In order to remove such an inconvenience, Shrī Loknāth Pustakālay is presenting in your service a corrected, refined, purified, and accurate edition....

As for the plot, it is not copied from anyone, it is original.²⁸

Another publisher offers a strange nine-birth edition in which the Sāraṅgā-Sadāvrij birth is only number seven, and two more (human) births, results of another of Indra's curses, are added after it, before the lovers are restored to an honorable place in Indra's heaven.²⁹

Even more interestingly, **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** has given birth to an offspring: a qissa about Rūptārā, the lovers' daughter. At first the new story was a mere adjunct to its parent, and appeared within a composite work called **Rānī Sāraṅgā tathā Rūptārā kā gīt**. This composite work includes eight previous births, the marriage-breaking plot--and the story of Rūptārā, who falls in love with a washerwoman's son named Devkumār. But before she can elope with him, she is carried off by a Dānav. Most of the story concerns Devkumār's search for her, in the course of which he not only recovers her, but acquires four other wives as well. In the last few pages, Rūptārā's younger brother, Rupkumār, falls in love with a princess, and wins her by the simple expedient of asking her father for her hand. The story is told in mixed prose and verse. More recently, however, **Kissā Rūptārā** has taken on a life of its own; substantially the same

²⁸Version B, p. 2.

²⁹**Rānī Sāraṅgā kā gīt, nav janma kī vārtā, solah bhāg sampūrṇ**, by Mahādev Prasād Siṅh Ghanshyām (Calcutta: Aruṇ Pustakālay and Press, 72 p., Hindi), pp. 65-72.

story is told, but entirely in prose.³⁰

Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij is by far the most complicated and inaccessible of the perennials. Within the scope of this chapter I have hardly been able to do more than to outline its main versions, and emphasize their diversity. **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** needs and deserves further study: it is not so much a qissa as a complex of qissas. It has been popular in northwestern India for at least five hundred years. And in all that time, far from acquiring an authoritative text, it has not even come to have a stable plot. It remains a kind of blur surrounding the striking, archaic names of **Sāraṅgā** and **Sadāvrij**--a vague vision of love in childhood, secret meetings in temples, a passion which overcomes obstacles. Can its continuing, extreme textual fluidity be accounted for in some way?

Part of the answer may lie in its special and systematic use of metrical forms. All the other perennials are essentially prose works--as are almost all qissas in print today. They use occasional couplets (**dohā, shi,r**) to comment on the narrative, and scenes of high emotional impact may include lyrical passages of verse. But these are small decorations embedded haphazardly in the prose which is the basic narrative medium. In comparison to the other perennials, **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** has an extraordinarily high proportion of verse. Prose passages serve only to effect the regrouping of characters, the transition from scene to scene. The verse-dialogue "scenes" themselves are static set-pieces in which nothing happens except the exchange of words. But what words! Passionate pleas, desperate arguments, fervent protestations, deviant avowals, shrewd persuasions, clever deceits are constantly taking place. These emotionally charged verse dialogues are the heart of the story. They remain vivid in the memory long after the flat connective prose passages which advance the plot have faded and blurred. Though the proportion of prose to verse may vary in different versions, the systematic opposition of flat factual prose to intense, expressive verse is maintained with remarkable consistency. The plot is so free to change because it is only the string which holds the metrical pearls together. It is not for nothing that **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** has emerged from several centuries of Rajasthani metrical romance tradition.

No theses about **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** can easily be proved, however, for it is hard to think of ways to test them. To what can **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij** be compared? No other qissa varies as much, no other qissa maintains such a systematic relationship between verse and prose. No other qissa consists essentially of elaborate verse dialogues which wrestle with the problem of a passionate, illicit, and successful love. **Lailā Majnūn** is the only other serious love story in qissa form, and it seems to have made an early-twentieth-century change from all-verse versions to all-prose ones. **Sāraṅgā Sadāvrij**'s uniqueness is part of its fascination, and part of its claim to further study.

³⁰**Rānī Sāraṅgā tathā Rūptārā kā gīt**, by Shrī Rām Ayodhyā Prasād Rāy (Calcutta: Sachdev Pustakālay, 1968, 102 p., Hindi); **Kissā Rūptārā** (Varanasi: "hākurprasād and Sons, 24 p., Hindi).