

## Insha Allah Khan: *Rānī ketkī kī kahānī* (c. 1803)

Insha Allah Khan (c. 1756–1818) was an Urdu poet who found patronage in the courts of Lucknow, Murshidabad and Delhi; it was in Lucknow that he wrote the delightfully eccentric ‘*Tale of Queen Ketkī*’. Though it is this text for which Insha is remembered in Hindi circles, he was primarily a prolific literary virtuoso whose oeuvre included compositions in Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Panjabi; he was extraordinarily versatile, his range extending from frivolous verses on women’s underwear to the *Daryā-e Latāfat*, the first methodical treatment of Urdu grammar and dialect.

The tale is written as a self-conscious linguistic exercise, deliberately turning away from established literary conventions in order to produce a piece of writing based on the spoken style of ‘Hindavī’; the deliberate exclusion of all non-Hindi vocabulary, including *tatsama* words as well as the more obviously ‘foreign’ loans from Arabic and Persian, makes this an entirely artificial experiment.

Insha’s story is a romantic tale full of supernatural and fantastic events, elements derived from the age-old traditions of oral story-telling: the narrative is based on a well-trying formula, the tribulations of star-crossed lovers whose families are locked in internecine strife. The extract here is from the opening of the text and forms a preface to the narrative.

The first section is a formulaic expression of humble supplication to Allah and of eulogy of the Prophet and Ali, and a statement of allegiance to the Shia tradition; all the Islamic references are necessarily expressed euphemistically, in conformity with the author’s self-imposed ban on Arabic and Persian vocabulary. The extract begins with a couplet of doggerel (loosely based on the *dohā* metre) in which the author sets out the nature of his experiment, and this theme is taken up again in the second half of the extract. Here Insha reports how the idea of writing a story in the unmixed vernacular came to him, and how the plan was ridiculed by a conservative old-timer who considered the project unworkable; the author vigorously defends his scheme, insisting that he knows what he is doing and that he is not making any excessive claims. The extract ends with the author addressing his audience directly in the manner of an oral story-teller as he exhorts his audience to pay full attention.

The text is taken from the standard Devanagari edition: Shyamsundar Das, ed., *Rānī ketkī kī kahānī* (6th ed., Varanasi: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1966), pp. 1–3. Some textual variants are given in G.A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. IX, pp.103 ff.

For the Urdu background see *UL* pp.60–63; for examples of Insha’s verse and a fuller biographical note see D.J. Matthews and C. Shackle, *An anthology of classical Urdu love lyrics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) pp. 84–95, 195–196. Insha’s place in the development of Hindi prose is described by R.S. McGregor, ‘The rise of standard Hindi and early Hindi prose fiction’ in T.W. Clark (ed.), *The novel in India: its birth and development* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), pp.142–178; a slightly expanded version of the article appears in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1967), Parts 3 and 4, pp.114–132.

यह वह कहानी है कि जिसमें हिंदी छुट ।  
और न किसी बोली का मेल है न पुट ॥

५ सिर झुकाकर नाक रगड़ता हूँ उस अपने बनानेवाले के सामने जिसने हम सब को बनाया और बात की बात में वह कर दिखाया कि जिसका भेद किसी ने न पाया । आतियाँ जातियाँ जो साँसें हैं, उसके बिन ध्यान यह सब फाँसें हैं । यह कल का पुतला जो अपने उस खेलाड़ी की सुध रखे तो खटाई में क्यों पड़े और कड़वा कसैला क्यों हो । उस फल की मिठाई चक्खे जो बड़े से बड़े अगलों ने चक्खी है ।

देखने को दो आँखें दीं और सुनने को दो कान ।  
नाक भी सब में ऊँची कर दी मरतों को जी दान ॥

१० मिट्टी के बासन को इतनी सकत कहाँ जो अपने कुम्हार के करतब कुछ ताड़ सके । सच है, जो बनाया हुआ हो, सो अपने बनानेवाले को क्या सराहे और क्या कहे । यों जिसका जी चाहे, पड़ा बके । सिर से लगा पाँव तक जितने रोंगटे हैं, जो सबके सब बोल उठें और सराहा करें और उतने बरसों उसी ध्यान में रहें जितनी सारी नदियों में रेत और फूल फलियाँ खेत में हैं, तो भी कुछ न हो सके, कराहा करें । इस सिर झुकाने के साथ ही दिन रात जपता हूँ उस अपने दाता के भेजे हुए प्यारे को जिसके लिये यों कहा है - जो तू न होता तो मैं कुछ न बनाता; और उसका चचेरा भाई जिसका ब्याह उसके घर हुआ, उसकी सुरत मुझे लगी रहती है । मैं फूला अपने आप में नहीं समाता, और जितने उनके लड़के-बाले हैं, उन्हीं को मेरे जी में चाह है । और कोई कुछ हो, मुझे नहीं भाता । मुझको उस घराने छुट किसी चोर ठग से क्यों पड़ी ! जीते और मरते आसरा उन्हीं सभों का और उनके घराने का रखता हूँ तीसों घड़ी ।

२० डौल डाल एक अनोखी बात का

एक दिन बैठे-बैठे यह बात अपने ध्यान में चढ़ी कि कोई कहानी ऐसी कहिए कि जिसमें हिंदवी छुट और किसी बोली का पुट न मिले, तब जाके मेरा जी फूल की कली के रूप में खिले । बाहर की बोली और गँवारी कुछ उसके बीच में न हो । अपने मिलनेवालों में से एक कोई बड़े पढ़े-लिखे, पुराने-धुराने, डॉंग, बूढ़े घाग यह खटराग लाए । सिर हिलाकर, मुँह थुथाकर, नाक भौं चढ़ाकर, आँखें फिराकर लगे कहने - यह बात होते दिखाई नहीं देती । हिंदवीपन भी न निकले और भाखापन भी न हो । बस जैसे भले लोग अच्छों से अच्छे आपस में बोलते चालते हैं, ज्यों का त्यों वही सब डौल रहे और छाँह किसी की न हो, यह नहीं होने का । मैंने उनकी ठंडी साँस का टहोका खाकर झूझलाकर कहा - मैं कुछ ऐसा बड़-बोला नहीं जो राई को परबत कर दिखाऊँ और झूठ सच बोलकर उँगलियाँ नचाऊँ, और बे-सिर बे-ठिकाने की उलझी-सुलझी बातें सुनाऊँ । जो मुझ से न हो सकता तो यह बात मुँह से क्यों निकालता ? जिस ढब से होता, इस बखेड़े को टालता । . . .

अब आप कान रख के, आँखें मिला के, सन्मुख होके टुक इधर देखिए, किस ढब से बड़ चलता हूँ और अपने फूल की पंखड़ी जैसे होठों से किस-किस रूप के फूल उगलता हूँ ।

Insha exploits the possibilities of alliteration and rhyme almost to the point of self-indulgence, and delights in the extravagances of metaphor and idiom. Archaisms in his language show the norms of early nineteenth century idiom and orthography, while the writing of cj. ptc. as two words shows that H usage had not yet developed separately from that of U (513).

4 *bāt kī bāt meh*: 'in the twinkling of an eye, instantaneously' (542).

4 *vah kar dikhāyā ki jiskā bhed kisī ne na pāyā*: 'made manifest that [creation] whose secret none can fathom'. *ki* (846) is pleonastic, as often with a relative pr. not followed by a correlative clause (*jo ki* etc.); cf. 21 *ki jismeh hindavī chuṭ*.

4 *bhed*: one of only a handful of *tatsama* words in the whole passage.

4 *ātiyān jātiyān jo sānseh haiñ*: 'those breaths which come and go'. The ptc., with full fp. concord as still found in Panjabi, is archaic.

5 *uske bin dhyān*: 'without meditation upon him', i.e. the Creator.

6 *khaṭāi meh kyoh pare*: 'why should he fall into unpleasantness'; the image, extended by the alliterative *karvā kasailā* 'bitter and astringent' alludes to the suffering which can be avoided if man remembers his maker.

6 *cakkhe*: the archaic doubled consonant is for rhyme with 6 *rakkhe*, where it is a genuinely preserved feature (H *rakkhnā* < *rakṣati*: 521a,b).

9 *nāk bhī sab meh ūncī kar dī*: 'has raised [our] status amongst all'.

9 *martoh ko jī dān*: 'to the dying, the gift of life' — the phrase is governed by 8 *denā*; ptc. *martā* is used nominally (532).

10 *itnī sakat kahān*: a rhetorical use of *kahān*, 'how could it have the power' (*sakat* < *śakti*); cf. rhetorical 11 *kyā sarāhe aur kyā kahe*.

11 *yoh jiskā jī cāhe, parā bake*: 'whoever so chooses may lie around gabbling uselessly', i.e. all attempts at praising God are in vain.

12 *lagā*: an adv. use, completely replaced by *lekar* in modern HU.

12 *sabke sab*: 'the whole lot, each and every one' (542a).

13 *nadiyoh meh ret aur phul phaliyān khet meh haiñ*: rhyming prose bolsters the hyperbolic poetic image.

14 *karāhā karaiñ*: 'moan as they may', i.e. their attempts at praise would be useless. *karaiñ* (for *kareñ*) is archaic.

14 *us apne dātā ke bheje hue pyāre ko*: 'that Beloved sent by our Lord', i.e. Muhammad, sent by Allah.

16 *uskā cacerā bhāi jiskā byāh uske ghar huā*: i.e. the Prophet's cousin Ali, who married the former's daughter Fatima. Cf. 17 *unke larke-bāle* i.e. the descendants of Ali, leaders of the Shia sect.

17 *maiñ phulā apne āp meh nahīñ samātā*: 'I cannot contain my joy', an idiom based on *phulnā* 'to blossom with joy', usually without *apne āp meh*.

18 *kisī cor ṭhag se kyoh pari!*: 'why should I have anything to do with any thief or plunderer!' — possibly a derogatory reference to the Sunni sect, or alternatively to Krishna, the 'butter-thief' (*mākhan-cor*).

19 *jīte aur marte*: 'living and dying', i.e. in life and in death.

19 *unke gharāne kā rakhtā hūñ tison gharī*: to the [allegiance] of their lineage I ever pledge myself'. *tison gharī*: 'all 30 *gharīs*', i.e. all day long. A *gharī* is a period of 24 minutes, thus one thirtieth of twelve hours.

22 *tab jāke*: 'and then [and then only]' — a common HU expression, often *tab kahīñ jākar* 'then maybe, with luck'.

24 *yah khatrāg lāe*: 'introduced this note of discord'. *khatrāg* derives from S *ṣaṭ* + *rāg*, '[all] six musical modes', i.e. cacophony.

25 *yah bāt hote dikhāi nahīñ detī*: with its adv. use of the obl. ptc. *hote* (532) the idiom is very close to the E 'I don't see this happening'.

- 25 *hindaviṣan bhī na nikale aur bhākhāpan bhī na ho*: an ambiguous rhetorical statement, probably meaning 'It would neither lose its Hindavi [U] quality nor take on the character of the regional vernacular [Braj]'.
- 26 *acchoṅ se acche āpas meṅ bolte cālte haiṅ*: 'talk amongst themselves in the best way'; *cālnā* echoes *bolnā* as in *bolcāl* 'conversation' (524).
- 27 *chāñh kisī kī na ho*: 'there should be no semblance of any other [language]'. In modern H *chāñh* is replaced by its S etymon *chāyā* (17).
- 27 *yah nahīn hone kā*: 'this isn't possible, this can't happen'.
- 27 *unki thaṅḍī sāns kā tahokā khākar*: 'suffering the blow of his deep [lit. 'cold'] sigh', i.e. after having to listen to his sarcastic sighing.
- 28 *barh-bolā*: 'exaggerator, tall-talker' (perhaps implying 'one who can magically bring things into being just by speaking to them').
- 28 *rāi ko parbat dikhānā*: 'to present something as it is not' — quite distinct in sense from the E idiom 'to make a mountain out of a molehill'.
- 29 *uṅgliyān nacānā*: = *uṅgliyon (par) nacānā* 'to have dance at one's fingers', i.e. to make dance to one's own tune.
- 29 *be-sir be-ṭhikāne kī uljhī-suljhī bāteṅ*: 'muddled matters having neither rhyme nor reason'.
- 30 *muñh se kyōn nikāltā*: 'why would I even utter it?'.
- 31 *jis dhab se hotā*: 'in whatever way it could be done'.
- 32 *kān rakh ke āñkheṅ milā ke*: 'listening attentively and looking [me] full in the face'.
- 32 *kis dhab se barh caltā hūn*: 'in what fine style I proceed'.
- 33 *kis-kis rūp ke phūl*: 'flowers of what varied beauty' (542a).