

D.C. Phillott:
Khwāb o khayāl (1910)

The work from which this passage is taken has a somewhat curious background. One Sita Ram Pande, a Brahman from Avadh like so many of the native troops who ensured British victory in the numerous wars fought in India in the early nineteenth century, is alleged to have composed his memoirs in old age, in about 1861. This Hindi version has, however, never come to light: and the work first appeared in an English version by Sita Ram's former commanding officer under the title *From Sepoy to Subedar* in 1873, when its 'old-soldier' loyalist tone ensured an enthusiastic reception from the Anglo-Indian press.

Some years later, this alleged autobiography was chosen by Lieut.-Col. D.C. Phillott, a senior member of the Government of India's board of language examiners, as an eminently suitable text to be prescribed for the examination syllabus. Phillott prepared a simple Urdu version, which continued to be prescribed for the Higher Standard Hindustani examination from 1910 until the end of the Raj.

Phillott was himself a fine scholar of both Persian and Urdu, whose works include a magnificently full *Higher Persian Grammar* besides many ingenious Urdu teaching-manuals, such as his *Hindustani Stumbling-Blocks*. So his choice of linguistic register for his version was quite deliberate, as is made clear by the tone of his introduction, e.g. 'generally speaking colloquial expressions have been substituted for literary ones. . . The student should practise on servants and sepoys what colloquial he has stored up in his memory from the book. He must, however, bear in mind the fact that the vocabulary of Hindus differs somewhat from that of Muslims. . .'

Both this artificial style — albeit the closest of all the passages in this book to that oddly elusive Hindustani middle-ground — and its outrageously loyalist sentiments are sufficient explanations for its failure to extend its role as a prescribed text for British officers, so as to secure the genuine place in Urdu prose literature achieved by the similarly British-inspired *Bāg o bahār* (1).

In the first paragraph, the old sepoy affectionately recalls his first officers (c. 1812), true Sahibs who earned all sorts of nicknames from their devoted troops: in the second, he speaks of the Indian women they used to keep as mistresses. This leads to the final paragraphs, in which Sita Ram reflects not only on how well the officers of old used to get on with their men, but how much better they could speak Urdu than their later successors. All this is, of course, very much grist to Phillott's didactic mill: as his introduction again observes, 'it must be recollected that a language cannot properly be learnt from books alone; the ear and tongue require training, and this is only to be acquired by considerable practice.'

The text is based, with some adaptation to modern spelling-conventions, on D.C. Phillott, *Khwāb o Khayāl or "Visions of the Past"*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: The Author, 1914), pp. 28–31.

The original English translation (*sic*) is best consulted in the modern edition of J. Lunt, *From Sepoy to Subedar* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 23–25.

آٹھ انگریزی افسر میری پلٹن میں تھے لیکن میری کپنی کے کپتان صاحب اصلی صاحب تھے ، جیسا میرے خیال کے مطابق صاحب کو ہونا چاہئے۔ ان کا نام برم پیل تھا۔ قد میں چھ فٹ تین انچ تھے۔ ان کا سینہ ہنومان کی طرح کشادہ تھا اور زور کی تو کوئی انتہا نہ تھی۔ وہ ہمیشہ سپاہیوں سے کشتی لڑتے۔ اور جب اکھاڑے میں اترتے تھے تو سب کی نظر ان پر پڑتی تھی۔ انہوں نے سب پتج سیکھ رکھے تھے۔ کسی سپاہی کی مجال نہ تھی کہ ان کو نیچا دکھائے۔ سب سپاہی ان کو پہلوان صاحب کہتے تھے۔ ہر صاحب کا سپاہی لوگ ایک نہ ایک نام رکھ دیتے۔ ایک کو نواب صاحب کہتے تھے۔ ایک کا لقب ڈام صاحب تھا، کیونکہ ہمیشہ حکم دیتے وقت وہ "ڈام" کہا کرتے تھے۔

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اکثر صاحب ہندوستانی بیبیاں رکھتے تھے۔ پلٹن میں ان عورتوں کا بہت کچھ اختیار تھا۔ ان کو اپنے اپنے صاحبوں کے مزاج میں گو اچھا دخل تھا مگر اتنا نہیں جتنا وہ بناتی تھیں۔ وہ اپنے اختیار کو بڑھا کر بیان کرتی تھیں تاکہ وہ سپاہی جن کو رخصت لینے کی ضرورت ہو یا کوئی کام نکالنا چاہتے ہوں ان کی مٹھی گرم کریں۔ بعض اوقات خود سپاہی اس کی تدبیر کرتے تھے کہ اپنے بال کی کسی عورت کو کسی افسر کے حوالے کریں۔ مگر ایسے لوگ نیچ ذات کے ہوتے تھے....

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صاحب لوگ اُس زمانے میں ہماری بولی اب سے کہیں اچھی بولتے تھے اور ہم لوگوں سے زیادہ ملتے جلتے تھے۔ اب افسروں کو امتحان پاس کرنا پڑتا ہے لیکن پھر بھی وہ ہماری بولی اس طرح نہیں بول سکتے، اگرچہ امتحان کے لئے ان کو کتابیں پڑھنی پڑتی ہیں۔ میں نے کتر دیکھا ہے کہ 'کیٹی' کے سامنے امتحان دینے کے بعد بھی کوئی صاحب چمٹی یا کتاب پڑھ سکتا ہو۔ وہ بس اپنے نوکرانوں سے پاجیوں کی سی بولی سیکھتے ہیں جو امیروں کی صحبت میں منہ سے نکالنے کے لائق نہیں ہے۔

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ان دنوں صاحب لوگ پلٹن میں اکثر نواح کو داتے تھے اور سپاہیوں کے ہر کھیل میں شریک ہوتے تھے۔ وہ شکار میں بھی سپاہیوں کو جو جانا چاہتے تھے، ساتھ لے چلتے تھے۔ اب وہ نواح میں کم آتے ہیں کیونکہ پادریوں نے ان کو منع کر دیا ہے۔ انہیں پادریوں کی کوشش سے صاحبوں اور سپاہیوں کے درمیان بیگانگی بڑھ گئی ہے اور بڑھتی جاتی ہے۔ جب میں سپاہی تھا ہماری کپنی کے کپتان صاحب تمام دن دو چار سپاہیوں کو اپنے بنگلے پر بات چیت کے لئے رکھتے تھے۔ اس میں شک نہیں ہے کہ بہترے اس غرض سے جاتے تھے کہ صاحب ان کی ترقی کی سفارش کرنل صاحب سے کریں مگر زیادہ تر لوگ اس لئے جاتے کہ ان کو کپتان صاحب سے دلی محبت تھی اور کپتان صاحب بھی اس طرح ان سے سلوک کرتے تھے گویا ان کے بچے تھے۔

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Some of Phillott's own brief notes to his version are included below within double quotation-marks, with suitable adaptations of their format.

1 *paṭṭan*: a disguised loan from E 'platoon', with the altered sense of 'regiment' in HU. E loan-words are naturally quite prominent in the military context of this passage (91–92), e.g. the following *kampanī* phonetically easily adaptable to regular HU use in both its military and commercial senses, and *kaptān*, which perhaps reflects the Portuguese 'capitão' as much as E 'captain'.

1 *aslī sāhib*: the only realistic E translation is 'pukka sahib'. Cf. 14 *sāhib log* 'the Sahibs'. An exactly comparable instance of the way in which loan-words shift in sense as well as pronunciation with their transfer to other languages is provided by P *sipāhī* > E 'sepoy', but 'private soldier, police constable' in modern U: cf. the degradation of PA *sūbe-dār* from its Mughal sense of 'provincial governor' to its colonialist use to designate 'Indian infantry N.C.O.'

2 *baram-pīl*: the odd transmission of this text makes it quite easy for Phillott to transcribe 'Burrumpeel' from the prior E version, but equally hard to determine the original, although 'Brougham-Peele' is tempting.

3 "*hanūmān*: the monkey chief of the Rāmāyan; now worshipped as a god. He was of powerful build."

4 *kuṣṭī larte*: 'would wrestle', one of those idiomatic phrase-verbs upon which Phillott and his school were fond of laying such emphasis to British aspirants to mastery of the Hindustani colloquial.

4 "*akhārā*: 'a wrestling place'; the earth is dug up, and there is generally a raised platform all round: hence any arena."

5 *majāl*: 'power', an A loan typically used in U in this negative sense, i.e. 'no soldier was able to'.

5 "*nīcā dikhānā*: generally = *maḡlūb karnā*", i.e. 'defeat'.

6 *ek nā ek*: 'one or another'. This pattern of HU jingle-compounds (524) is restricted to a few similarly pronominal doublets, e.g. *koī nā koī* 'someone or other', *kaise nā kaise* 'somehow or other', etc.

7 *laqab*: an A loan with the usual sense of 'title', but here = 'nickname', as in the deliberately idiomatic 6 *nām rakh dete*.

7 *dām*: 'Damn' (922), one of those E loans which keeps its place in HU in an oddly affectionate way, alongside such once-vilified words as *ṭāmī* 'Tommy' or *ṭodī* 'toady'.

9 *bībīyān*: 'women'. Although it is its P etymological doublet, *bībī* tends to lack in U the unambiguous status of *bīvī* 'wife'.

11 *barhā-kar*: 'exaggerating', cf. the common adv. use of *barh-kar* 'more'.

11 *ruxsat*: here in the technical military sense of 'leave'.

11 *kām nikālnā*: 'to get something fixed', another cunningly introduced idiomatic phrase-verb.

12 *muṭṭhī garm kareṅ*: lit. 'warm the fist', i.e. 'smoothe the palm, bribe', another useful idiom for candidates to learn in Phillott's day.

13 Asterisks in Phillott's text indicate the tactful excision of the E original's 'but such men were usually of low caste, or else Mahommedans'. It remains something of a mystery just how A *zāt*, taken over into U in its original sense in such phrases as PA *zāt-e ilāhī* 'the Divine Essence', came to be confused with S *jāti* 'caste' so thoroughly as to yield such jingle-compounds as *zāt-pāt* 'all that caste-business', by conflation with *jāt-pāt*.

14 *bolī*: both implying 'spoken language', and representing Phillott's choice of a deliberately down-market word. The same neutrality of NIA *bolī* has resulted in its modern use in Panjabi, on both sides of the international frontier, for E 'language', vs. the strong U preference for P *zabān* or A *lisān*, and that of H for S *bhāṣā* (522).

14 "*kahīn acchī*: 'far better'."

15 *milte julte the*: ‘used to mix with’, one of those HU verbal compounds (524) whose apparently meaningless second member is term in U a *tābi’-e muhmal* or ‘nonsensical follower’. The original sense is, however, preserved in Siraiki *julan* and Rajasthani *juḷnau* (= HU *calnā*), whose continuing omission from the *CDIAL* illustrates the impossibility of cataloguing all such *desī*-words.

17 *kamētī*: a well-engrained HU loan from E ‘committee’, nicely introduced by one who was for long himself a Chief Examiner.

17 *imtihān dene*: i.e. ‘taking an exam’, whose apparent U translation *imtihān lenā* has the complementary meaning of ‘to give an exam to’, in a striking illustration of cultural differences determining contrary uses in E and HU.

17 “*parh saktā ho: parhnā* ‘to read, generally to oneself; also to study’; but *sunānā* ‘to read aloud’. *parh denā* = *sunānā*, or *parh-kar sunānā*.”

18 “*pāji*: ‘wicked, naughty’, as *pāji larḳā* ‘naughty boy’: it also means low people.”

18 “*suhbat* f. ‘companionship’; and also copulation of humans.”

20 *nāc*: ‘dance’, i.e. a session performed by professional semi-prostitute dancing-girls (*tavāif*).

21 *jo*: rather awkwardly picking up the antecedent *sipāhiyōñ ko*.

22 *pādri*: the dental *-d-* reflects Portuguese ‘padre’ (91), but older Anglo-Indian usage determines the word’s coverage in HU of priests and ministers of all Christian denominations.

24 *bangle meh*: ‘in his bungalow’. Although much less numerous than the E loans in HU, the HU loans to E are subject to the same culturally conditioned rules of specializations in sense (cf. 1 *asli sāhib* above), e.g. not only *banglā* from ‘low-storey Bengali-style house’ to the ‘bungalows’ first of colonial India, then those of speculative developments in southern England, but also such items as HU *lūṭnā* and *khāt*, vs. E ‘loot’, ‘cot’.

25 “*un kī taraqqī*: indirect narration. The direct could also be used — *ki sāhib hamārī taraqqī kī sifāriś karēh*.”

26 *karnal*: ‘colonel’, with *-r-* by analogy from *jarnel* ‘general’.

27 *dilī muhabbat*: perhaps ‘genuine affection’, rather than lit. ‘heart-felt love’, vs. the tight tone of the original E ‘because we liked the Sahib’.

27 *un se sulūk karte the*: ‘behaved towards them’.