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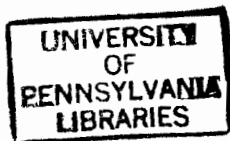
पानीं केरां बुदबुदा, अस मानस की जाति ।  
देखत ही छिपि जाइंगे, ज्यौं तारे परभाति ॥ - कबीर

*This life of ours is like a bubble of water;  
As soon as you see it, it disappears,  
Like the stars at dawn. - KABIR*



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# The Snake-bite Episodes in *Candāyan*: A Journey within a Journey

NASEEM HINES

*Candāyan*, completed in AD 1379, is considered to be the first Indo-Islamic Sufi *masnavī*. It is the earliest Indo-Sufi *masnavī* we have, and as such it is considered the pioneering work of the genre in Hindi and seems to serve as a model for the later works of this style. Maulānā (or Mulla Dāūd) (d. 1395) of Dalmau, the author of *Candāyan* is believed to be one of the disciples of Nizāmuddīn Auliā of Chisht. He composed the *masnavī* during the reign of Firoz Shāh Tughlaq (AD 1351-88), dedicating it to his prime minister, Jaunā Shāh. Unfortunately, very little else is known about Maulānā Dāūd.

*Candāyan* is based on the folk legend of 'Canainī' or 'Cāndā-Lorik'. Lorik and his devoted wife Mainā live in Govar, but when Lorik and Cāndā see each other, they fall in love and elope. After a long journey and many adventures, Lorik returns home with Cāndā. Initially, there is a conflict between Cāndā and Mainā, but Lorik intervenes to resolve it. In all, 452 stanzas of this composition are available but, since the text is incomplete, we do not know the precise conclusion of the story.

This paper focuses on the two 'snake-bite' episodes which in Parmeshwarilal Gupta's edition begin from stanza 333 and end on stanza 360. Eloping with Cāndā, on his way to Hardi Patan in the Kalinga region, where he hopes to visit with some kinsmen, Lorik puts up at a Brahmin's house. Here, in the night, Cāndā is bitten by a snake and dies. Later, she is revived by a Gunī's or Gāruḍī's *mantras*. Lorik offers the ornaments of his wrists and arms to the Gāruḍī, but the Gāruḍī asks for the rest of Lorik's ornaments and takes them away with him.

Cāndā and Lorik resume their journey the next day, and when night falls, they take shelter under a large tree. Here, once again, Cāndā succumbs to a fatal snake-bite. For two days and a night, Lorik cries in anguish for her. He constantly weeps, laments and

recalls the various risks they took to be with each other. He describes how miserably hopeless it is for him to be without her. He blames himself for the tragic incident and repents for his sins. Finally, he comes to the decision that he cannot live without her any more and decides to sit on the funeral pyre, holding her in an embrace. With this plan in mind, he begins to cut wood. However, a Gunī comes along and Lorik implores him to revive Cāndā. In return, he pledges all his belongings and promises to serve the Gunī for as long as he lives and also in the next life. Once again Cāndā is brought back to life, and they continue on their journey.

Now, the first question is, why did Maulānā Dāūd choose to have two snake-bite episodes? And secondly, why are the episodes placed one right after the other? Matprasad Gupta and Parmeshwarilal Gupta both agree that the second snake-bite episode is entirely Maulānā Dāūd's own creation and that the original folk tale of Mainā-Lorik or Canainī has only one snake-bite episode. My explanation is that when Maulānā Dāūd composed *Candāyan*, he selected a story, i.e. the folk-tale of Canainī, merely as a point of departure. The changes Maulānā Dāūd brought into the story and the sophisticated form he gave his composition altered its focus. It is transformed from a simple entertaining folk tale into an elevated literary work and a vehicle for transmitting Sufi doctrine. The journey of Lorik in *Candāyan* is essentially a journey of the individual self in search of The Universal Self and the two snake-bite episodes represent the pivotal point in this quest, for with them the story embarks upon the spiritual journey within Lorik's physical journey. Since the literary genre of *masnavī* is an allegorical mystical poem, the story must be understood on a different level and the Sufi symbols must be closely examined.

The first step a novice must take towards his mystical journey is in the direction of the *maqām-i-khalwat*, a place of retreat and vigil. Discussing the importance of this first step, Laleh Bakhtiar, in her book *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest* (1976, p. 94) says that to retreat to an isolated cell in order to 'remember' God is considered by many orders to be the most significant step for all Sufi disciples. It is an aid in achieving a state of permanent inward retreat. Observing the traditions of the Prophet, who used to retreat to caves in the mountains, some orders still recommend one to retreat to the solitude of nature. Many Sufi orders have isolated cells for the practice of the *khalwat*.

The premise or logic behind entering *khalwat*, the gateway to the subsequent stages of the mystical journey, is that respite from daily routine and distance from one's immediate surroundings provide the seeker with a different perspective. In both snake-bite episodes, Lorik is away from the two places he is most preoccupied with, i.e. his home and the battlefield. In the first episode, he is at a Brahmin's place and in the second, he is in a leafy arbor beneath a large tree. Here the association of the 'tree of knowledge' comes to mind, as for example, in the account of Buddha's enlightenment. According to the Sufis, as Mir Valiuddin says in his book, *The Quranic Sufism* (1987, p. 152), the stage of the spiritual retreat, if entered into and embraced with sincerity, has the potential to open the door to the next stage of the mystic journey.

Defining the spiritual stations of the internal experiences in Sufism, Carl Ernst writes in *Eternal Garden* (1992, p. 10): 'The Sufi Sarraj gives the meaning of stations as "the station of the creature before God, in terms of where one stands from devotions, exertions, meditations, and concentrating on God. Repentance (*tauba*), asceticism (*zuhd*), poverty (*faqr*), patience (*sabr*), trust in God (*tawakkul*) and satisfaction (*rida*) are some of the principal stations".'

In the light of the above understanding, let us briefly trace Lorik's journey through a few of the stations mentioned earlier. The first station is repentance (*tauba*). In the snake-bite episodes, Lorik repents for his sins again and again and blames only himself for his present predicament, saying that he got what he deserved (M.P. Gupta 1967, p. 313): जस कीन्हें, तस पायें. Asceticism (*zuhd*) is the next station: comparing his condition to Rām's when he was living an ascetic's life in Pañcavaṭī, Lorik says that he too is enduring Rām's circumstances (ibid., p. 317): लोरहि राम अवस्था परी.

When Lorik arrives at the next station, poverty (*faqr*), he first gives away all his material possessions in the first snake-bite episode and in the second episode is willing to serve the Gāruḍī all his life and the next if only the Gāruḍī can bring Cāndā to life. Lorik says (ibid., p. 324): हाथ क मुंदरी, खरग कटारा, कान क कुन्डर, चांद गियं हारा—तोरै कहें चांद जो लहडें—दुहौ जरम चेर होइ रहडें. The next stations are patience and the mystic's trust in God (*sabr* and *tawakkul*). The novice expects mercy from God alone. Lamenting bitterly for Cāndā, Lorik says (ibid., p. 313): दया गुसाईं सिरजनहारा, तोहि छाडि कस करडें पुकारा. ('Oh my maker, have mercy on me. Except you, who else should I call upon.')

When a novice enters seclusion, *maqām-i-khalwat*, he is also supposed to engage in constant *zikr*, i.e. repeated mentioning of God's attributes. During both the snake-bite episodes, Lorik keeps recalling the splendor of the joy he had in Cāndā's company and repeats her name over and over again (ibid., p. 320): संग न साथी, भे भे रोवा, मीत जो होत, से दई बिछोवा—कर गहि, चांद चांद गुहरावइ, धुनि धुनि सीस नारि पै लावइ. ('Deprived of his companion, Lorik was beside himself and wept aloud shamelessly, bemoaning the loss of his love. Holding Cāndā's arm, he called out 'Cāndā, Cāndā', leaning over her body and beating his head over and over again.') At this point Lorik is engaged in *zikr*.

The practice of *zikr* helps the disciple to disengage from his present and immediate surroundings and move from his self to concentrate on the divine. At this point, I am reminded of a mystic story I heard from one of my Persian Sufi friends. It goes as follows: A man falls in love with a beauty. He wants to see her and so approaches her abode and knocks at the door. The person within asks: 'Who is it?' 'It is I', came the reply. 'Turn away, it is not the right time to see the one you seek', said the person from within. The lover left and returned the next day at a different time, but the same incident was repeated, and he had to leave. In this way, the lover would visit the house of the beloved over and over again. One day, when the lover knocked at the door, from within came the same question: 'Who is there?' From the lover came the answer: 'You, it is you.' 'Enter now', came the command from within.

Studying the final stages of Lorik's journey, we realize that Lorik actually arrives at that station where he could distinguish the difference between the true essence and the mirror which merely reflects the divine reality. In the second snake-bite episode, when Lorik prepares to go on the funeral pyre, embracing Cāndā, he proclaims (ibid., p. 312): भई बात अब जानेई चांदा, तौरें मरन निदान—जो जिउ जाइ कया कस देखहि, मै का करब अबान. ('Only after your demise, Cāndā, have I realized that if the life departs, it is impossible for the form to remain intact. I have no say in this matter nor any other recourse.') Lorik is now prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice: the sacrifice of one's own self or ego. At this moment, he is without carnal desires and his mind is pure. In actively embracing self-annihilation, the ultimate sacrifice, he is actually moving towards his goal of union with the Eternal Joy and life everlasting. *Fanā*, the phenomenon of 'naughting the self' according to

William Chittick (1983 p. 173), is essentially the result of true love, already tested by sacrifice.

Not long ago, a Sufi master Janāb Amīr 'Alī's young daughter asked him: 'How may I differentiate and identify true love?' The teacher replied: मुहब्बत तो कुरबानियां चाहती है, तहे तेग पेशानियां चाहती है—जो डर जाए राहे वफ़ा में, मेरी जां, कोई और शै है, मुहब्बत नहीं है. ('Really, it is not very difficult to recognize love because it demands many sacrifices and enjoys putting the heads of the lovers through the test of the scimitar. Then, my darling, that which trembles in the path of total commitment, is surely something other than love.')

Elaborating on the subject of a mystic's journey through the various stations (*maqāmāt*), Laleh Bakhtiar says (1976, p. 52):

The spiritual stations are degrees of ascent, reached through certain rites and certain difficulties. They are permanent acquisitions, as opposed to states, which are gratuitous gifts that come and go with the attraction of the Divine (difference between *ḥāl*, *ahwāl* and *maqām*, *maqāmāt*). The ultimate station (*fanā*) is reached when the seeker loses his self in The Self. His final orientation is towards total receptivity: spiritual death. One of the most famous sayings of the Prophet, peace be on him, is 'Die before you die'. The tomb room in Konya of Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, the founder of the Mevlevi Order, is actually the place of his wedding for the night of his death is celebrated with all the joy that surrounds a wedding.

The *urs* or the wedding of Sufi saint is actually his death anniversary celebrated as the day of his annihilation (*fanā*) in the Unity of Being (*wahdat al-wajūd*).

Once again, the success of the individual soul in attaining union with The Universal Soul lies in the seriousness of one's pursuit and one's complete commitment and readiness to sacrifice everything to achieve this goal. Unconditional sacrifice, then, is the key to *fanā*. A *sākhī* attributed to the poet saint Kabir says (B. Tiwari 1985, p. 490): जिन दूँडा तिन पाइयां, गहरे पानी पैठि—मैं बूढ़ा, बूड़न डरा, रहा किनारे बैठि. ('Only those who sink clear to the base of the sea find what they seek. Scared of sinking and frail, I remain sitting on the sidelines.')

The presence of the Gārūdī or the Gunī in both snake-bite episodes and the significance of the Brahmin's presence in the first episode, which are symbolic of the spiritual guide or *hādī*, should also be recognized at this point. In Sufism, the novice's relationship with the teacher (*murshid murīd*) is of great significance because without the guidance of the teacher it would be

difficult for the mystic to realize his ultimate goal of *fanā'*, the last stage. Annemarie Schimmel (1992, p. 103) defines it as 'de-becoming'.

In both the episodes, the time of the snake-bite is late in the night, or rather when the day is about to break (M.P. Gupta, 1967, p. 313): "पाँचली" राति होत भिनुसारा'. This time is considered to be auspicious in many traditions. Symbolically, the veil of darkness or ignorance is about to be lifted and the light of knowledge is beginning to shine.

With respect to the second question, 'Why are the two snake-bite episodes arranged back to back?', my explanation is that in the mystic journey the seeker has to move from one state to the other without a major break. The *maqāmāt* have to follow each other closely without a major gap. According to Laleh Bakhtiar (1976, p. 94), after one leaves the *khalwat*, the spiritual retreat, one's position within the *maqāmāt* can remain effective only on the condition that the novice continues to practice *zikr*. In *Islam: An Introduction*, Annemarie Schimmel (1992, p. 104) says that 'in the uninterrupted struggle against the *nafs*, not only are poverty and fasting, nightly vigils and, often, silence required, but also constant introspection'. The key words here are 'continuation', 'uninterrupted', and 'constant'.

The first snake-bite episode, therefore, is symbolic of Lorik's setting forth on his spiritual journey and his arrival at that particular *maqām* where he is willing to part with all his material possessions. According to the Sufis, the seeker's successful arrival at this stage naturally leads him to the next logical state. Thus, the subsequent states are symbolized in the second snake-bite episode where Lorik arrives at that high point of his spiritual journey where he willingly relinquishes his desire to live in exchange for the eternal happiness he seeks in death.

In this way, in the snake-bite episodes we watch Lorik move successfully through the prescribed stages on his mystic journey. When he first faces separation from Cāndā, he is distraught with anguish and pain (M.P. Gupta 1967, p. 307): लोरक बीर बहु कारन करई-चाहि कपारै कुन्त दै मरई. ('Brave Lorik bemoaned and wept; taking an ax to his head he wished to die.') Then taking the vow of poverty he gladly gives up all his worldly belongings in order to get Cāndā back (ibid., p. 309): कर कंगन अभरन सभ दीन्हा. But when he loses her the second time, he does not wish to continue to live in

a world without her and says (ibid., p. 322): कोठ भान्त न जीवंत देखेठं, पौरि म के चेलि पिरम खेल सो नै खेलै, सो सर सेतै खेलि. ('The one who follows the dictates of love, is never seen to stay alive. Those who love their lives should not play the game of love.')

In *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* Nicholson says (quoted in L. Bakhtiar 1976, p. 95):

The relationship between the two stations has been expressed by Ibn Farid in the following way: 'Existence is a veil in the beginning of the mystic life, and also in its middle stage, but not in its end. The mystic is veiled in the beginning by the outward aspect of existence (created things) from the inward aspect (God), while in the middle stage, he is veiled by its inward aspect from its outward aspect. But when he has reached his goal, neither do created things veil him from God nor does God veil him from created things, but God reveals Himself to the mystic in both His aspects at once as the Creator and as the universe of created things, so that the mystic sees with his bodily eye the beauty of the Divine Essence manifested under the attribute of the Outward.'

In conclusion, when I was studying the available texts of *Candāyan*, it was amazing to find that in the story, there is actually a significant break after the above discussed snake-bite episodes. The composer-narrator pauses for a moment and allows his peer Maulānā Natthan to step into the narrative and express his opinion of the snake-bite episodes of *Candāyan* (M.P. Gupta 1967, p. 327): आखिर बिसहर खन्ड चन्द सुखन फरमूदने मौलाना नथन. The gist of the exchange between them is as follows: Maulānā Natthan says, 'Maulana Dāūd sang this song and whoever heard it was visibly moved' (जे रे सुना सो गा मुझाई). 'Blessed are the words and blessed is the author, and those who recite it and those who mull over and contemplate the real meaning of it' (धनि रे सबद, धनि लेखनहारा, धनि ते बोल धनि अरथ बिचारा). To this praise, Mullā Dāūd modestly responds, तोर कहा मै यह खन्ड गावठं . . . . ('On your request, I sing this chapter, reciting to people, the story in verse: Lady Cāndā was going to Hardi and was bitten by the snake—I merely narrated that story.') In the courtly manner expected of Mullā Dāūd, he credits Lord Natthan for his own accomplishments: 'Really, it is Lord Natthan who brings forth the tragic emotion' (नथन मलिक दुख बात उभारी). Mullā Dāūd politely concludes the conversation with the words, 'In deference to your wish, I shall compose more poems, contemplating deeply in my mind. I bow my head and join my hands in supplication.'

After this exchange, the narrative of *Candāyan* continues much

along the established path of the folk-tale. For example, in the next stanza, Lorik bids good-bye to the Gāruḍī, but somehow, the reader is left with the impression that after Maulānā Natthan has left, the narrator is saying to the rest of the audience who is still waiting to hear the remainder of the story, 'And so where was I?, Oh, yes, and then. . . .' Perhaps the truth is that Maulānā Dāūd, Maulānā Natthan and those who are initiated, informed, and experienced quickly arrive at the true meaning of the snake-bite episodes and for them the story has already arrived at a successful conclusion. The true understanding of the knowledge of the divine can never be logically explained. One experiences and interprets the spiritual phenomenon according to one's own purity and depth.

Ghālib, in the fourth chapter of the opening *ghazal* of his *dīwān* says: आगही दामे शुनीदन जिस तरह चाहे बिछाए, मुद्दा अन्का है अपने आलमे तकरीर का. ('No matter how Learning may spread her trap of reference, understanding the true meaning of my world of expression by logic is like capturing *ankā* [the legendary rare bird].')

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