

Nawab Faizunnesa's  
*Rupjalal*

# Women and Gender

The Middle East and the Islamic World

*Editors*

Margot Badran  
Valentine Moghadam

VOLUME 7

# Nawab Faizunnesa's *Rupjalal*

*Translated and commented by*  
Fayeza S. Hasanat



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON  
2009

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Caudhurani, Phayajunnesa, 1834-1903.

[Rupajalala. English]

Nawab Faizunnesa's Rupjalal / translated and commented by Fayeza S. Hasanat.

p. cm. -- (Women and gender : the Middle East and the Islamic world ; v. 7)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-16780-3 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Women--India--Bengal--Social conditions. 2. Women--India--Bengal--History. 3. Caudhurani, Phayajunnesa, 1834-1903. Rupajalala--Criticism, Textual. 4. Bengal (India)--Colonial influence. 5. Nationalism--India--Bengal--History. I. Title. II. Title: Rupjalal. III. Series.

HQ1744.B4C3812 2008

305.48'69709541409034--dc22

2008032132

ISSN 1570-7628

ISBN 978 90 04 16780 3

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

*For Lutu*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project began with my curiosity about the condition of Muslim women in colonial Bengal. It is not an outcome of one woman's solitary enterprise; advice and comments received from friends and professors have contributed to the making of this work. I want to acknowledge my indebtedness to Susan Hegeman for giving me the idea of translating *Rupjalal*. I am grateful to Malini Schueller for her unfailingly helpful suggestions. I consider myself lucky to have received feedback from Sidney Wade. I do not know if I would ever be able to repay Swapna Banerjee for her generosity and warm hospitality. Most of all, I am forever grateful to Pamela Gilbert, my supervisor. I cannot thank her enough for bearing my procrastination, frustration, and fear, with unbelievable patience. I want to acknowledge Mansur Musa of Bangla Academy for providing me with a copy of *Rupjalal*. Thanks to him, Faizunnesa's phenomenal work will reclaim its place in history through this translation. I want to thank Professor K.D. Verma for publishing a revised part of my introduction in the December 2007 issue of the *South Asian Review*. I would like to express my thanks to my colleagues at the University of Central Florida for their constructive feedback on the manuscript; I am especially thankful to Adrienne Viviane for lending me her proofreading eyes! I am also grateful to the anonymous readers and reviewers from Brill Publishers. I want to thank Trudy Kamperveen, Sasha Goldstein, and Nicolette van der Hoek of Brill for their editorial support. Sheuli, Kaberi, Bindu, and Nitol—my beautiful sisters and brother, I want to thank you for your unconditional love and support. I am indebted to my parents: to my father, who taught me how to dream, and to my mom, my Mother Courage, who always protected her children from all the adversities of the real world. My daughter, Unmona, deserves a sentence of her own in this acknowledgment for being a wonderful editor. She read the manuscript, offered constructive suggestions and, at times, felt almost 'powerful' for having an opportunity to pen through my thoughts! I also want to thank my son, Ujaan, for brightening up my weary days with his sense of humor. Finally, I want to thank my husband, who constantly criticized me for

not putting extra effort into my work, or for not being serious enough. I admit that at times I felt frustrated and doubted my confidence, but his belief in me never wavered. I want to acknowledge his contribution by dedicating this book to him.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Recasting Muslim Women: Nawab Faizunnesa's Rupjalal*

The aim of this project is to rectify history's neglect of Nawab Faizunnesa (1834–1903), a pioneer Muslim woman in colonial India. My intent to analyze, historicize, and translate *Rupjalal* (1876)<sup>1</sup> is motivated by Faizunnesa's importance in the making of Muslim women's history in colonial Bengal. Though Muslim women in colonial India have been the center of many academic research works, Bengali Muslim women have not received academic attention until the publication of Sonia Nishat Amin's *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal*.<sup>2</sup> Amin takes a historicist approach in her analysis of the [Muslim] Woman question by acknowledging Nawab Faizunnesa as a precursor to modern Muslim women. Amin also points out the predominant use of sexual imagery in

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<sup>1</sup> Faizunnesa, *Rupjalal* (Dhaka: Munshi Maula Box Printers, 1876). The book is written in Bengali and I will be using my own translation of the text in the discussion. I have italicized all non-English words, other than names of persons and places.

<sup>2</sup> Azra Ali, for example, historicizes the condition of Muslim Women during the early twentieth century British India, focusing mainly on the Urdu speaking Muslim community in *The Emergence of Feminism among Indian Muslim Women* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000). Shahida Lateef's *Muslim Women in India: Political and Private Realities* (London: Zed Books, 1990) discusses the status and role of Muslim women in Northern India. With special emphasis on the history of Muslim women and Urdu literature, Gail Minault's *Secluded Scholars* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) does extensive research on Muslim women's education and social reform in colonial India. On the other hand, Meredith Borthwick, in her *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal: 1849–1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), and Geraldine Forbes, in her *Women in Modern India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), mostly historicize the women question in colonial Bengal focusing on the rise of Hindu middle class women. They, however, have discussed briefly the life and works of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, who is hardly mentioned in the works of Ali and Lateef. Only Minault has analyzed in some detail Hossain's contribution to the reformation movement of Muslim women in colonial Bengal. Dagmer Engels's *Beyond Purdah: Women in Bengal, 1890–1939* does a socio-historic analysis of Bengali Muslim women's reformation. In Ghulam Murshid's *Reluctant Debutante* (Rajshahi: Rajshahi University Press, 1978), Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's role as the pioneer Muslim feminist is discussed, along with Bengali Hindu women writers and activists of colonial Bengal. Bharati Ray's recent book, *Early Feminists of India* (Delhi:

the text, which was a common element in Bengali literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Taking my cue from Amin, I explore the socio-cultural context that has inspired a Muslim woman to write about female sexuality, interpreting Faizunnesa's "frank sexuality"<sup>4</sup> as the most crucial aspect of her text that points, even if indirectly, at the complicated discourse of sexuality in a religiously specific yet culturally hybrid world of Muslims in colonial Bengal. Hence, my intention is to read *Rupjalal* as a manifesto of Muslim women's sexual defiance and subordination in nineteenth century Bengal.

The reformation movement of *Brahmo Samaj*<sup>5</sup> had an influence on the Hindu orthodoxy that eventually led to the conditional freedom of the Hindu woman (as she was allowed to go to public places, meet men in social gatherings, and in some cases, go abroad for higher studies).<sup>6</sup> Muslim society's treatment of the female body was totally different from that of an orthodox Hindu or a liberal *Brahmo* society. The Muslim patriarch of colonial Bengal, directly influenced by the Middle Eastern Islamic culture, believed in the inherent danger of a woman's sexuality and, therefore, tried to control her by imposing on her various cultural and political constraints.<sup>7</sup> A woman's body was seen as a threat to the patriarchal harmony as it arouses sexual desire and thus chaos. The Muslim female body was also considered a threat to herself because she was always in danger of being tempted or forced to be the focus of male desire. The Muslim patriarchy thus considered it a religious duty to protect and control the female body, and it created

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Oxford University Press, 2002), recognizes Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's contribution. However, the only extensive historiographic work in English is Sonia Amin's *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876–1939* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), which I have used as my primary source for this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal*, 216–217.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>5</sup> Founded in 1818 by Raja Rammohun Roy, the *Brahmo Samaj* inaugurated a movement to educate Bengali women. As *Brahmo Samaj* represented the reformed middle class strata of colonial Bengal, their social and religious ideologies were different from those of the orthodox Hindus and the conservative Muslims. See Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal* and Forbes, *Women in Modern India*.

<sup>6</sup> Amin, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 23. Mernissi points that the whole religious culture of Islam revolves around the power of women that the Muslim patriarchy considered destructive. Women have the power to create chaos by invoking desire. Social balance can be lost because of this. The solution is to keep women's sexual hunger satisfied and subdued.

a religiously interpreted space for its woman, designating her specific role and position concerning her duty as a (Muslim) woman, daughter, mother, and citizen. Thus, a Muslim woman's body was both a proof of and a threat to her existence, and she had to struggle hard in order to keep herself invisible.<sup>8</sup>

As Fatima Mernissi argues, the contradictory theory of female sexuality implies that the power inherent in a woman's "divinely decreed inferiority" instigates "disruptive effects" on Muslim social order and, therefore, it needs to be neutralized.<sup>9</sup> This neutralization of female sexual aggression was done systematically in an attempt to recast her as a veiled, silenced, and passive creature whose existence outside her marital life was never welcomed. Nawab Faizunnesa herself observed seclusion and performed all her administrative duties as a ruler of a province from behind a veil.<sup>10</sup> The veil, however, did not keep her invisible, as she stood out as a pioneer of Muslim women's education, economic independence, and personal freedom. She challenged the Muslim notion of authority by writing about sexuality, a subject which the Muslim community of colonial Bengal (along with the entire Muslim world) considered dangerous. The aim of this present study is to examine how a Muslim woman crossed this boundary by examining the politics involved in the interpretations of [Muslim] female sexuality.

Faizunnesa admits in her preface that her own unhappy marital life encouraged her to write *Rupjalal*. The autobiographical narrative, then, intermingles with other indigenous sources derived from Bengali, Hindu, and Muslim culture, which operate collectively to speak for a silenced female voice. *Rupjalal* is as much a representation of rebellion as it is a revelation of a Bengali Muslim woman's subordination to her patriarchal social order. The female characters in the text express their concerns about their bodies, sexuality, and desire. They also share an element of fear of repression and even annihilation at the hands of the male patriarch. Faizunnesa takes up a revolutionary role as she addresses the issues of social, political, and economic marginality of

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<sup>8</sup> Amin, 43.

<sup>9</sup> Mernissi, 39.

<sup>10</sup> But Faizunnesa used her power as a ruler to have mobility and she traveled around her estate in a palanquin. See Raushan Begum, *Nawab Faizunnesa O Purba Bangor Muslim Samaj* (Nawab Faizunnesa and the Muslim Society of East Bengal. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993), 46. Written in Bengali, Begum's is the only book that has done a full-length research on Faizunnesa's life and works. I have depended greatly on this book.

women in an Islamic, nationalist and imperialist culture of nineteenth century Bengal. The translated text, along with my analysis, will substantiate my argument that Nawab Faizunnesa and her *Rupjalal* trace the emergence of a self-conscious female voice by reacting and adapting to the process that recast Muslim women's sexuality on the negotiated ground of religious and national culture of colonial Bengal.

### *Biographical Sketch*

Faizunnesa Choudhurani, or Chowdhury (later known as Nawab Faizunnesa),<sup>11</sup> was a courageous Muslim woman who broke societal norms by making herself visible through her social and literary activities. She was possibly the first Muslim woman to write poetic fiction in Bengali, set up schools and hospitals for girls in Bengal and charitable institutions abroad,<sup>12</sup> become a successful *zamindar* of her province in Tippera (or Tripura) of East Bengal, and live a single and independent life apart from her polygamous husband. Finally, she completed the crossover by receiving the title Nawab from Queen Victoria, an honorary title that the British government normally attributed to the (male) rulers of various provincial estates.

Faizunnesa's life was influenced by colonial rule. Her family history contains resistance against and complicity with the British rulers. In her preface she mentions the incident of her maternal grandfather, Mozaffar Gazi Chowdhury's death. At the wake of colonial rule in Bengal, Chowdhury preferred death to submission to the imperial ruler and committed suicide. Her father, on the other hand, kept friendly relations with the rulers as "he used to hunt with the judges and commissioners and many other government officials. The royal officials were pleased with [her] father and made frequent visits."<sup>13</sup> Faizunnesa became a part of that ruling process by demanding and accepting the

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<sup>11</sup> Even though some scholars, Amin for example, have spelled her name 'Faizunnesa,' I will spell it Faizunnesa—with one 's.'

<sup>12</sup> See Begum, 62–67. Begum notes in her book that Faizunnesa established a *madrasa* and a lodge for traveling pilgrims in Mecca in 1894 and made arrangements to send a specified amount of monthly donations. Faizunnesa went to Mecca in 1894 to perform Hajj—the religious pilgrimage. Even though a significant number of Indian women were traveling abroad by 1890, it was still uncommon for a Muslim woman to travel abroad. This issue of traveling and Bengali Muslim women is calling for more academic research.

<sup>13</sup> Preface to *Rupjalal*; my translation.

*Nawab* title from Queen Victoria in 1889.<sup>14</sup> Her acceptance makes her complicit with colonial rule, but her demand to be acknowledged as a *Nawab* is what makes her a rebel.<sup>15</sup> By making that demand, she was not only challenging the male rulers of colonial Bengal, but also taunting the imperial power by asking for equal rights as a tax paying subject, and demanding acknowledgement for her competence in the [male-dominated] social and political sphere.

In 1873, Faizunnesa established a school for Muslim girls in Bengal.<sup>16</sup> This school used Bengali language as a teaching medium, which was a revolutionary idea in the Muslim culture of colonial India that considered either Persian or Urdu as a suitable medium of education. She made her effort more challenging by adding English to the curriculum. Thus, at a time when Muslim women all over colonial India were only learning to read and recite the Koran from their tutors at home

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<sup>14</sup> Magistrate Douglas, the district magistrate of Tippera once requested all the *zamindars* to donate money for his province development plan. Only Faizunnesa responded to the request, and gave Douglas the whole amount needed for the project. Douglas recommended to the British government that Faizunnesa should be awarded with a title for her social works. In the Victorian India, “*Nawab*” was the highest title of honor normally offered to a *zamindar*. Douglas’s suggestion, however, created a political issue as the male *zamindars* opposed the idea of giving a woman the highest title (*Nawab*) associated with the masculine identity of a successful ruler. They wrote a petition to Queen Victoria against Douglas’s appeal. Queen Victoria, in order to resolve the problem, decided to award Faizunnesa the title of “*Begum*”—the feminine gender—generally meaning a *Nawab*’s or *Zamindar*’s wife, or a respectable woman of high class. Faizunnesa refused the title saying that she was already known as a *Begum* to her subjects and that the British government should give her the title she deserved for her performance as an efficient *zamindar*. The British Parliament then resolved the case in Faizunnesa’s favor, and in 1889, Queen Victoria declared her a *Nawab*. For biographical details, see Raushan Begum, *Nawab Faizunnesa*, 69–71. There was no official source other than the government survey report considering this incident. Begum mentions that W.H. Thompson, the Settlement Officer of British Government, wrote in his *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operation in the District of Tripura* that “she was offered by Government the title of Begum. But by Faizunnesa it was not accepted, as she wanted the masculine title of Nawab. This was ultimately given to her.” See Begum, 70–71.

<sup>15</sup> She was however not the only woman to rule a province. The Begum of Bhopal was renowned for her active part in the women’s movement in the early twentieth century. Begum Rokeya’s eldest sister also acted as the head of her estate after her husband’s death. But no other woman ruler besides Faizunnesa had found it degrading to bear a gendered title of Begum. See Minault, *Secluded Scholars* for a discussion on the Begums of Bhopal. Also, see Richard Barnett’s article, “Embattled Begams: Women As Power Brokers in Early Modern India,” in Gavin Hambly, ed. *Women in the Medieval Islamic World* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 521–537.

<sup>16</sup> It was notably the first school for Muslim Girls. See Begum, 45.

or at small Islamic institutions, girls in Faizunnesa's school learned to read and write Bengali and English.<sup>17</sup> The elementary school was upgraded to a junior high in 1889, and after Faizunnesa's death, it became Faizunnesa Girls' High School in 1931.<sup>18</sup> In 1893, Faizunnesa founded a charitable *Zenana* hospital which was run by British missionary doctors and nurses under the supervision of the Bengal branch of Dufferin Fund, before becoming a part of Comilla General Hospital in 1929.<sup>19</sup>

The courage that Faizunnesa showed in her life and work was the result of having liberal parents. Faizunnesa's father was so liberal that he hired a male tutor to teach his two daughters, disregarding the Islamic tradition. Faizunnesa learned the Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and Bengali languages from her tutor and later acknowledged in the preface of *Rupjalal* that this teacher, Ustad Tazuddin, had enabled her to look beyond the limitations and superstitions of her religious and social culture.<sup>20</sup> Faizunnesa also had the privilege to have a confident mother who took over the duties of a *zamindar* after the death of Faizunnesa's father. Faizunnesa's experience of the changing role of Muslim women in her own home had given her incentives to work for the improvement of women's condition in Bengal. Another factor that worked for her advantage was her late marriage. Even though child marriage was an established custom in both Hindu and Muslim culture in Bengal,<sup>21</sup> Faizunnesa did not get married until she was twenty-seven years old.<sup>22</sup> Throughout her life she received tremendous support from her two

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<sup>17</sup> It should be noted here that The Presidency College of Calcutta started to admit Muslim male students from 1873, the year when Faizunnesa started her English School for Girls in a remote village of Bengal. Anglo Oriental College, the first westernized College for Muslim men, was established in 1875 by Sir Syeed Ahmed Khan. See Minault's *Secluded Scholars* and Lateef's *Muslim Women in India* for discussions on the education of Muslim men and women in colonial India.

<sup>18</sup> Begum, 39.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 61. Also, see my translation.

<sup>21</sup> The Age of Consent Bill was introduced in 1891, and the Child Marriage Restraint Act was not initiated until 1929. Mrinalini Sinha notes that both the Muslim and Hindu community reacted against the Bill, calling it an attack on religious principles. See Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: Manly English Man and Effeminate Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 138–159.

<sup>22</sup> It was customary that girls were given to marriage at the beginning of puberty. While child marriage followed strict age limits in Hindu custom, it was a little lax in Muslim culture and allowed women to stay unmarried until 12 to 14. See Begum, 32–35. Minault, 76.

elder brothers, which enabled her to stand against her polygamous husband, litigate him for the promised marital alimony,<sup>23</sup> and perform her duties as a *zamindar*.

Faizunnesa received her first proposal of marriage in 1843 when she was nine years of age. She recalled in *Rupjalal* that Mohammad Gazi Chowdhury, a *zamindar* of a neighboring estate and a distant relative, visited her father and fell in love the moment he saw her. Faizunnesa's father rejected the proposal because of her age. However, Chowdhury's obsession for Faizunnesa remained even after he married another woman, and his obstructions made it difficult for Faizunnesa's family to make any marriage arrangements for her. Eventually, with the permission of his first wife, Chowdhury proposed for the second time in 1860, and succeeded in marrying Faizunnesa. Faizunnesa's brothers made Chowdhury sign a prenuptial agreement which stated that he would stay with Faizunnesa in her paternal home and that he would never take her to his own estate to live with Nazmunnesa, the co-wife. However, Chowdhury broke the agreement in 1865 and took Faizunnesa and their two daughters to his estate by force.<sup>24</sup> Around 1867, Faizunnesa went to court claiming the promised marital alimony from Chowdhury, and she received a share of his property instead of the promised money. The marital dispute was thus settled and the love story of Chowdhury ended in separation. Though the relationship did not work out, Faizunnesa remained devoted to her husband until her death in 1903. It is interesting to note that Faizunnesa dedicated *Rupjalal* to her husband, Mohammad Gazi Chowdhury, blaming his first wife, Nazmunnesa, for their failing marriage.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In Muslim law, a groom agrees to pay a certain amount of money, known as *mohrana*, to the bride in case of separation. For discussions on Islamic Marriage laws, see Anne Roald, *Women in Islam: the Western Experience* (London: Routledge, 2001), 123–167.

<sup>24</sup> After spending five years in conjugal happiness, Chowdhury took Faizunnesa and his daughters on a boat journey that ended when the boat reached his own estate. Faizunnesa refused to stay in that house and blamed Chowdhury for breaking the prenuptial agreement. She abstained from taking any food or water from his house, and for seven days, Faizunnesa's brothers sent drinking and bathing water and food for her. Chowdhury failed to reason with her obstinacy and threatened that she would have to leave the eldest daughter behind if she decided to leave him. On the eighth day, Faizunnesa left her husband's house forever, with her youngest daughter. Faizunnesa met her husband only once in 1889 when the dying man wanted to see her. See Begum, 62–74.

<sup>25</sup> See my translation.

*The Muslim Community and its Women in Colonial India*

Faizunnesa worked for women's social reform<sup>26</sup> at a time when reformation for Indian Muslims on a larger scale was just seeing its dawn. In fact, Muslim intellectuals in India had just begun to seek modification of various religious restrictions on Muslim society. The British Empire considered Muslims the most hostile community after the rebellion of 1857,<sup>27</sup> and this had a great impact on the social, political and economic conditions of the Muslim society.<sup>28</sup> By the end of nineteenth century, it became clear that a community's economic and social position depended on its political liaison with the British government.<sup>29</sup> The Muslims found themselves left out from the reformation agenda of other developing communities, and they felt the need to reform their politically hostile view of the British regime. Muslim leaders first resisted, then opted for western education and inaugurated a framework for social reform to prepare Muslim men to survive in the changing context of a colonized society.

The impact varied greatly in different regions. In the Northern estates of Oudh, for example, the Muslim community depended on government patronage and accepted the new British rules in order to retain its dominant position. In Western India, Muslims were mainly traders, and they were able to team up with other religious communities to claim the government's attention. In the South, as in Bengal, since the majority of Muslims were peasants, the agrarian economy was preventing them from getting government employment or patronage. In North India, Shah Wali Ullah (1703–1762), a teacher at a Muslim educational institute at Delhi, took the first initiative by translating the Koran from Arabic to Urdu, arguing that religion should be reformed according to the cultural factors of a society. He argued that the Urdu speaking Muslims of North India should read the Koran in their own language. He also wrote a book to explain the reasons of the decline of the Muslims in India asking the Muslims to accept social changes and liberate themselves from religious restraints. Wali Ullah's son, Shah Aziz (1746–1824), did not agree completely with his father's ideology.

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<sup>26</sup> Both Amin and Begum have mentioned that Faizunnesa was famous for her philanthropic works. She established schools for boys and girls, orphanages, hospitals, and contributed large sums of money for the development of the province.

<sup>27</sup> Amin, 165.

<sup>28</sup> Lateef, 17–25.

<sup>29</sup> Lateef, 19–27; also, see Azra Ali, 5–9.

He considered any territory under the British rule as being in a state of war; however, having realized the need of reform, he urged Muslims to have western education.<sup>30</sup> Another important social reformist of North India was Syeed Ahmed Khan of Oudh<sup>31</sup> (1817–1898), who worked for what Minault called a “rapprochement between the British and the Indian Muslim elite.”<sup>32</sup>

In Bengal, religiously motivated political leaders like Titu Meer (1782–1831) led agrarian revolts against British rule in western Bengal in 1830, while after 1857, leaders like Haji Shariatullah (1871–1940) and his son Dudu Mian organized Muslim peasants to fight against the Hindu landlords.<sup>33</sup> The Muslims in Bengal had their first organized association in 1863 under the leadership of Nawab Abdul Latif. The organization was called “The Mohammedan literary and scientific society of Calcutta.”<sup>34</sup> In 1877, Amir Ali established the National Central Mohammedan Association to represent Muslim interest.<sup>35</sup> These leaders followed other Muslim leaders of Northern India and advocated western education. Amin notes that Bengali Muslim reformers were influenced by the conservative reformation strategies of the Deoband school<sup>36</sup> and the more liberal ideologies of Aligarh college<sup>37</sup> in their attempts of modernizing the Muslim community.<sup>38</sup> Various organizations, such as *Musalman Suhrid Shammilani* and *Bangiya Parishilani Samiti*, started to undertake educational and cultural reform programs.<sup>39</sup> The middle class Muslim community became interested in the process of modernization which was anti-traditional in the beginning

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<sup>30</sup> For a discussion on Waliullah and his son, Shah Aziz, see Minault, 20–23.

<sup>31</sup> Syeed Ahmed Khan was a leading advocate of social reform in the Northern India. He founded Aligarh College in 1875, advocated for social reform in the Northern India, and stayed loyal to the British and earned knighthood because of his loyalty. Even though he spoke in favor of a westernized education for Muslim men, he however opposed the idea of educating Muslim women. See Minault, 18.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Lateef, 23.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–24.

<sup>36</sup> Deoband School followed a conservative method to train reformist religious scholars. See Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>37</sup> Founded by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817–1898), Aligarh College followed a liberal curriculum in order to provide westernized education for Muslim scholars. See Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generations: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

<sup>38</sup> Amin, 24–26.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 31–32.

as it questioned the fundamentalist interpretations of *Hadith* and *Sharia*, and which later reinstated national/religious traditions in the wake of nationalist movement.<sup>40</sup>

### *Recasting Muslim Women*

Even though women's rights of property and marital consent were asserted in the Koran,<sup>41</sup> Islamic patriarchy was reluctant in following that direction, because of which Muslim women had basically no voice until the second half of the nineteenth century. Turkey was the first country to modify family law in 1850 and was seconded by Egypt.<sup>42</sup> Influenced by the family law modification movement that started in Turkey and Egypt in 1850, Muslim leaders of India eventually felt the importance of the modification and paid a belated attention to their women. As a result, a small fraction of Muslim women started going to school. By 1930s, Muslim women in general experienced a change in their social positions as they acquired the right to divorce and to their property after new laws were passed.<sup>43</sup> According to a government review (the first Quinquennial Review of Education—1881–1886),<sup>44</sup> among the Muslims, women's education was encouraged up to a certain age and standard. A woman was considered sufficiently educated if she could read the Koran in Arabic, and read and write the vernacular language, and in some cases, read books in Urdu. The review noted that strict seclusion, or *purdah*, made it difficult for Muslim women to attend schools. The standard of education was better in the southern provinces of Bombay and Madras than that in Bengal, Punjab, and the central provinces.<sup>45</sup> In West Bengal, Muslim girls attended Missionary schools in Calcutta from as early as 1830. Besides the Missionary Schools, many other schools were established by East India

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Also see Rafiuddin Ahmed for a detailed history of *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> There is one specific *sura* or verse in the Koran, titled "*Nisa*" (or woman), which explains in detail a woman's rights in Islamic society. See Arthur Arberry's translation: *The Koran Interpreted* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 97.

<sup>42</sup> Lateef, 71.

<sup>43</sup> The law to ensure Muslim women's right to property was passed in 1937 and the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage act was passed in 1939 to ensure Muslim women's right to divorce. See Lateef, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Lateef, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 18.

company officials, the British colonial government, and the reformist leaders.<sup>46</sup> Various governmental records and newspapers of nineteenth century Bengal recorded the increase of attendance of Muslim girls at those schools.<sup>47</sup> However, Muslim girls were not allowed admission to Bethune School till 1897,<sup>48</sup> and a separate school for Muslim girls was not established until Nawab Faizunnesa took that initiative in 1873.<sup>49</sup> Amin explained that the Bengali Muslim leaders were influenced by both the *Brahmo Samaj* and western culture to restructure the pattern of education for Muslim women as they decided to include Bengali and English, along with sewing and embroidery, in order to modernize the curriculum. The average Bengali Muslim woman received education from the privacy of *purdah*. On the other hand, a privileged part of Bengali community came under western influences “through education, job, and the process of cultural adaptation set in among Bengal Muslims, and it became fashionable at first among the upper class to keep female teachers or governesses, who were mostly Anglo-Indian or native Christian women of modest means.” In some cases, “some elite families (such as the Dhaka Nawab family) kept governesses for their daughters in imitation of Victorian England.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, the Muslim reformation movement basically syncretized the reformist agendas of the *Brahmo samaj* and the Middle Eastern Islamic community, along with the indigenous cultural forms and traditions of colonial Bengal.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See Amin, 146–149. For a discussion on female education in 19th century Bengal, see Murshid, *The Reluctant Debutante*, Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women*; Usha Chakravarti, *Condition of Bengali Women around the Second Half of the 19th Century* (Calcutta: The Author, 1963).

<sup>47</sup> Amin, 143–144.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>49</sup> Begum, 63.

<sup>50</sup> See Amin, 137. For a detailed analysis of the rise of Bengali renaissance, the flourishing of education among men and women of the Bengali middle class, and the reformation movement of the *Brahmo Samaj*, see Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, and David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). For discussions on Bengali (Muslim) renaissance of nineteenth century, see Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims: 1871–1907* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), Jayanti Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: 1855–1906* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchee & co, 1984), and Mahmud Shah Qureshi, *Seizure of Consciousness and Position: Role of Muslims in the Bengal Renaissance in Culture and Development* (Dhaka: Syeda Quamar Jabeen, 1982).

<sup>51</sup> Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Traditions in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). Also, see Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Delhi:

This new attitude of Muslim males was not different from the Hindu reformers who, according to Partha Chatterjee, considered the Indian woman an epitome of the nationalist tradition, clearly distinguishing her from the westernized woman of the upper class and the common woman of the lower class. This new woman, perfected with her western education was designed to reform the degenerate condition of lower class women and elevate the nation's status. The nationalist patriarch's image of this "new woman" was based on the adulation of woman as goddess or mother; "in fact, the image of woman as goddess or mother served to erase her sexuality in the world outside the home."<sup>52</sup> Muslim patriarch's idea of reformation, though based on the reformist agenda of Hindu nationalist ideology, marked its difference in the handling of women. Hindu reformist leaders recast women as icons of "spiritual quality of national culture," teaching them to attain "the typically bourgeois virtues characteristic of the new social forms of disciplining" and allowing them to "go to schools, travel in public conveyances, watch public entertainment programs, and in time even take up employment outside the home," as long as their identity was fixed "in terms of certain culturally visible spiritual qualities" that retained their "essential femininity."<sup>53</sup> Muslim reformers, on the other hand, kept in mind the sexual danger inherent in a woman, while focusing on her also as a symbolic power source of a culture, its anarchy, and reformation.<sup>54</sup> Take, for example, Sir Syeed Ahmed who wrote in his

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Oxford University Press, 1999), and Eaton, ed. *India's Islamic Traditions* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> Chatterjee, 131.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>54</sup> While discussing this issue of difference and similarity between the two religious reformist groups, Minault agrees with Chatterjee, saying that to some extent Muslim reformers did consider women as the angel of the private domain, a symbol of a religious culture that is worth preserving. Minault also mentions Faisal Devji who argued that male authority in the nineteenth century India considered woman as the source of disruption and a potentially equal partner at the same time, a belief that necessitated her seclusion since she posed a threat to male authority. Minault furthered her argument by saying that "woman, whether seen as an issue, a symbol, or an object, is a passive and somewhat abstract figure." See Minault, *Secluded Scholars* for a discussion on the women issue in colonial India. Also, see Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Issues of Widowhood: Gender and Resistance in Colonial Western India," in Haynes and Prakash, eds. *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), and Devji, "Gender and the Politics of Space: The Movement for Women's Reform in Muslim India, 1857-1900," in Hasan, ed. *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State* (New Delhi: Kali For Women, 1994), 121-127.

*Causes of Indian Revolt* (1858) that “the talk of female education is annoying to [Muslim] natives since pupils go about unveiled; such schools have actually been established in Bengal.”<sup>55</sup> He stated in his “Report to Education Commission of 1882” that “the present state of education in my opinion is enough for domestic happiness, considering the present social and economic conditions of life of Mohammedans in India ... when the present generation of Mohammedan men is well educated and enlightened, the circumstances will necessarily have a powerful, though indirect effect on the Mohammedan women.”<sup>56</sup> Besides Ahmed, other nineteenth century Muslim leaders were more concerned about women’s seclusion and chastity than their intellectual improvement,<sup>57</sup> and “since the interpretation of the Koran remained a male preserve, ... restrictive social structures led to a complete erosion of the rights of Muslim women in the nineteenth century, greatly reduced their access to education, deprived them of control of their property, and ruled out divorce or remarriage, thus effectively undermining their economic independence.”<sup>58</sup>

The reformative movements and western influences had a more uplifting impact in the recasting of Hindu women than on Muslim women because of the very fact that Islamic culture and ideology stamped sexual identity so strongly on its woman that it was difficult for her to exist outside her sexuality. While “the [Hindu] nationalist male” thought of his own wife/sister/daughter as “normal” precisely because she was no more a “sex object,”<sup>59</sup> a Muslim male reformer considered his wife/sister/daughter always a sex object. Thus, for him, she was beyond normal; she was dangerous. According to Faisal Devji, the discourse of Muslim women’s role in the reformist agenda can be categorized as the legal, the mystical, and the orthodox; the legal discourse regarded women as the source of disruption, the mystical focused on spiritual love, and the orthodox dealt with the religious sphere.<sup>60</sup> Drawing their sources from “the *Brahmo* reformist agenda and

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Lateef, 47.

<sup>56</sup> Lateef, 48.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>59</sup> Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 132.

<sup>60</sup> Faisal Devji, “Gender and the Politics of Space: The Movement for Women’s Reform in Muslim India,” quoted in Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 8.

the Middle Eastern reinterpretation of Islam,”<sup>61</sup> the reformists adjusted their notion of woman as a source of disruption, or *fitna*, with a religious coating of an ideal Muslim woman, recasting her as an “enlightened, educated, model sister,”<sup>62</sup> or “an ideal woman, a modern day Ayesha, or Fatima.”<sup>63</sup>

### *Women, Writing, and the Body*

*Brahmo Samaj* represented the reformed middle class strata of colonial Bengal. Their social and religious ideologies were different from that of the orthodox Hindus and the conservative Muslims. However, the main idea—that a woman should get education only to serve her home better as a wife, mother, and daughter—was commonly shared by men of all castes, classes and religions.<sup>64</sup> The degree of social variance was noticeable when the concern was the presentation of the female body in public. In all upper class families, regardless of their religions and castes, *pardah* was the mode of status. Only lower class working women had the freedom to move in public. In most cases, Hindu and Brahmo women were required to cover their bodies and their heads with *sari*. They would go out in public in a covered carriage so that people would not see them.<sup>65</sup> However, the reformation movement of *Brahmo Samaj* had enabled Hindu women to walk in streets, go abroad, and meet men in social gatherings.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, a Muslim woman had to use layers of clothes and a long veil to cover her from head to feet. She could see the world only through the holes of the veil. For a Muslim woman, her body was both a proof of and a threat to her existence, and she had to struggle constantly in order to keep herself invisible.<sup>67</sup>

*Brahma Samaj*’s reformation agenda regarding a woman’s rights over her body and property started with its primary campaign against widow immolation, child marriage, and its supporting effort to legalize

<sup>61</sup> Amin, 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>64</sup> Meredith Borthwick has done an extensive research on the women of *Brahmo Samaj* in her *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal*.

<sup>65</sup> See Borthwick’s *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal* and Forbes’ *Women in Modern India* for a detailed discussion.

<sup>66</sup> Borthwick, 121.

<sup>67</sup> Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal*. 114–119.

widow remarriage, and also to revise marriage laws and age of consent. However, the ultimate goal of the reformation process centered around a woman's role and function in the nationalist movement, as a result of which, the issue of female emancipation "disappeared from the public agenda of nationalist agitation," making the woman question "an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state."<sup>68</sup> According to Chatterjee, the entire phase of the nationalist struggle was motivated by the need "to protect, preserve, and strengthen the inner core of national culture." Imitation and adaptation to western world was used to strengthen the "inner core." But that strengthened core had to be protected and preserved in order to protect Indian (men)'s identity from annihilation.<sup>69</sup> If this is the case, then, Indian women were nothing but the "body-object" that constituted for Indian men their "spiritual distinctiveness." The female body was a mere tool with which the nationalists constructed the foundation of their traditional homes. The Indian woman became a contested site for the nationalists, where nation and woman were amalgamated. Such foundations demanded the loss of woman's rights over her body. Since the woman question became a part of a nationalist discourse, which left no scope for the real women to speak about their public and political rights, "the battle for the new idea of womanhood in the era of nationalism was waged in the home."<sup>70</sup> Chatterjee examined how women writers worked silently in their secluded zones, trying to write a history of women's sufferings and struggles through their autobiographies, travel narratives, and other types of literary texts. Rashsundari Devi (1809–1900), Krishnabhabini Dasi (1864–1919), and Binodini Dasi (1863–1941), among a few notable others, were critical of the representations of the female body as a sexual object, a spirit incarnated, and as a property of and ideal for the man and nation in a colonial context.<sup>71</sup> I want to explore further and argue that along with these above mentioned pioneers, two Muslim women writers deserve to belong to Chatterjee's list of notable Bengali women writers of the nineteenth century: one of them is Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932), and the other one is undoubtedly Nawab Faizunnesa (1834–1903).

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<sup>68</sup> See Chatterjee, "The Nation and its Women," in Guha, ed. *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986–1995* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 255.

<sup>69</sup> Chatterjee, 120–122.

<sup>70</sup> Chatterjee, "The Nation and its Women," 259.

<sup>71</sup> See Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 135–157.

The aforementioned women writers attempted to represent their position in society vis-à-vis the family. However, these representations were also shaped by their experiences within their own castes and classes. For instance, Rashsundari Devi belonged to an orthodox Hindu family of East Bengal. She represented the women of Bengal in the pre-reformation period. The missionaries were setting up schools in different parts of Bengal during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The boys in Rashsundari's village also received primary education from an English woman in the missionary school. Rashsundari was allowed to sit with them until she was ten (around 1819). She was the subject of child-marriage at the age of twelve, and after she came to live with her in-laws, she lived the life of a silent, obedient (and thus perfect) Indian woman. What threatened to displace her from that locus of perfection was her desire to learn to read. Yet, extraordinary though it was, her desire was not rebellious since she only wanted to read the religious scriptures. After learning to read, she somehow exemplified the traditional Hindu woman, as she could spread the morals of religion among the women listeners of her home. Her act of reading, therefore, can be analyzed in terms of patriarchal gain; after all, she was gaining and regenerating the kind of message that Hindu scriptures had intended to confer upon Hindu women. In this context, the threat of displacement from the locus of traditional ideal was resolved for her. However, the notion of knowledge as a gain changed when she emerged as a writer and represented her female body from different perspectives. In her autobiographical narrative, *Amaar Jiban (My Life*, published in 1875), Rashsundari had positioned herself as a daughter, a daughter-in-law, a mistress of the house, as a mother, and finally, as a writer. Throughout the book, she represented herself as a suffering, compassionate, and submissive woman who used writing as a medium to establish a relationship "between her individual understanding and her life—something that she brings out through a series of questions addressed to God."<sup>72</sup>

While discussing Rashsundari's representation of womanhood, Chatterjee comments that "nationalists of the twentieth century saw in Rashsundari's story only a confirmation of their construction of the true essence of Indian womanhood: self-sacrificing, compassionate, spiritual, and possessing great resources of emotional strength drawn

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<sup>72</sup> Tanika Sarkar, *Words to Win: The Making of Amaar Jiban* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).

from personal faith and devotion.<sup>73</sup> However, what Chatterjee does not mention is her realization about the power (or powerlessness) of the female body. Throughout her narratives, Rashsundari stayed constantly amazed by the miracle of the female body. In the very beginning of the book, she mentioned, “this body, this mind, this very life of mine, have taken on several different forms.”<sup>74</sup> She then went on giving accounts of her life as a child, as a child-wife, as a matured woman, as a mother, and as a mistress of the house. Then, nearly in the middle section of her book, she again took on the theme of her amazement at the miracle of her body in the following way:

When I reflect upon my own body and mind, I am overwhelmed and bewildered. In this life of mine, my body and mind have gone through several phases. It is not easy to spell out how they were before, what they are like now, and what they are moving towards at this moment .... When I was seven or eight, I was a little more intelligent. That however, had little effect. My mind was still *passive* and the body extremely delicate and *weak*. Others looked after my needs, I could take no initiative on my own. Some time passed in this way. I was married off when I was twelve. After that, I lost the unbound love that I had enjoyed at my father’s house. I have become *completely subordinated*. My childishness was totally stripped away, I became the new bride. In the meantime, the great Lord had decked out my body as *one fits out a boat, with every necessary article*. What a wonder that is! It is nothing short of a miracle. So many things happen to my body, and I know nothing of their causes.<sup>75</sup> (my italics)

Rashsundari described the three stages of her female body, namely, childhood, marriage, and the attaining of womanhood. In all these stages, the body is considered passive, weak, and subordinated. While writing about her life and her devotion to God, Rashsundari did not remain in the spiritual domain forgetting her physicality. She made her body a subject of scrutiny and marveled at its power. Her description became more challenging when she pointed at the sexuality of her body. The comparison of a female body decked with “every necessary article” to a boat well-prepared for its journey is unmistakably sexual. A well-grown female body thus became a site of wonder and miracle for her, and would remain so until that site was contested.

Nearly at the end of her writing, Rashsundari eventually looked at her body as a site of loss and remorse as she found herself as a puppet

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<sup>73</sup> Chatterjee, 144.

<sup>74</sup> Rashsundari Devi, *Amaar Jiban*, translated by Tanika Sarkar in *Word to Win*, 140.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 189–190.

at the hands of God after the death of one of her sons. She blamed God for taking away her son. Calling the Creator “adhikari,” or the proprietor of the theater of life, she explained how she had been playing along at God’s theater. She remembered what joy she had felt after the son was born:

With him in my arms, I feel I do matter, I feel as if I am holding the moon in my hands. Then I truly feel that this home, this household, all this does, indeed belong to me. My body dances with joy, my mind keeps in step with it. I forget about my own body as a separate thing. I hold my child at my breast. I feel he is dearer to me than my own life .... Soon after this, you snatch away my son from my breast, from my arms .... One of your names is the Merciful One. It is chanted across the three worlds. I have to call you that even when you are merciless.<sup>76</sup>

Rashsundari’s proud assertion of the power of her body is so self-satisfying that, if God is a man (and vice versa), then this assertion really challenges his authority. The only way the authority would then re-establish its control is by destroying the symbol of her power. Tanika Sarkar has convincingly argued in her book that even though Rashsundari’s autobiography evolves from her thirst for religious knowledge and her love for God, she eventually “contemplates—not with bliss, but with considerable pain—the games that God is playing with [her life].”<sup>77</sup> Throughout the narrative, Rashsundari addressed God in usual masculine terms while presenting her body as an instrument in His hands.

Chatterjee argued that the Indian woman, as an epitome of nationalist tradition was clearly distinguished from the westernized woman of the upper class, and the common woman of the lower class. This new woman, reformed with her western education, was designed to elevate the nation’s status.<sup>78</sup> When this newly formulated woman’s body experienced a cultural and geographical displacement, her trained mind would take pride in her traditional superiority. Krishnabhabini Dasi exemplified this new type of woman. With the establishment of the famous Bethune School in 1849, middle class Hindu families, who were earlier reluctant to send their daughters to Missionary schools, changed their minds and started to send their daughters to this school for a westernized education. Women also received education from many other

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>78</sup> Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 126.

schools, from *Zenana* teaching (mainly English Governesses were hired to teach women living in seclusion), and from private teaching (in this case, the husband was the secret teacher). Krishnabhabini Dasi received her education from her English-educated husband, Deben-dranath Das, who belonged to an upper class, liberal Hindu family. His father was a friend of Vidyasagar, who pioneered the widow-remarriage movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. Das' brother, Srinath Das, married a widow in 1869, disregarding the orthodox customs of Hindu religion. Thus, Krishnabhabini came under the direct influence of the progressive patriarchy through her marriage into this family. Married at the age of nine, she went to England with her husband when she was eighteen, and published her travel narrative *Eng-lande Banga Mahila (A Bengali Woman in England)* in 1885, when she was only twenty-one years old. Since it was the first travel narrative written by an Indian woman, it had a significant role in representing the Indian female body in relation to her Imperial Other. Krishnabhabini noted in her book how much she wanted to visit England—the country of freedom, and how delighted she was to see the independent English woman. She also urged her countrywomen to come out of the prison of ignorance and be free like their imperial sisters. However, her enthusiasm reduced to nationalist ideology as she emphasized that Indian women should only learn the good things from the English women. She did not think that an educated Indian woman had to be financially independent like her imperial sisters. An Indian woman's education and her travel experiences should contribute to the making of her cultural superiority.<sup>79</sup> In her introduction, she described her imprisoned life in a *zenana*: "Female readers, I was locked up in the zenana just like you and I had no connection with anything of either my country or the world. I used to keep myself satisfied with the few things I found in the small world of the zenana." She used to complain to the Mother Nation for treating her daughters differently from her sons: "Mother Bengal! Many of your sons go there [England] in order to receive education. Why then Mother, can't we, your daughters go there and illumine our heart with knowledge? We too are human beings, and have eyes. But we are blind, and live in cages." She also expressed her gratitude after she went to England by saying, "With what difficulties have I come out, Mother, to fill my heart with the nectar of knowledge."<sup>80</sup> Her nectar

<sup>79</sup> My primary source here is Ghulam Murshid's *Reluctant Debutante*.

<sup>80</sup> For the translated Quotations from Krishnabhabini, I am using Murshid, 85.

was blended with her knowledge about the position of English women, in the family and society, as a responsible, educated, and independent member. However, despite her valorization of English women, her final resolution was to encourage Indian women to borrow the good things of the west and blend them with the superior traditions of India.<sup>81</sup> In other words, Krishnabhabini mainly corroborated the nationalist ideology of the superiority of a reformed Indian woman.

Chatterjee referred to Binodini Dasi in his discussion on women who were “left out.” He interpreted Binodini’s autobiography (*My Story*, 1912) as a personal document of betrayals that she experienced in the patriarchal society.<sup>82</sup> Discussing Binodini’s rise from the lower class as a prominent actress of her time, Chatterjee demonstrated how Binodini’s body had fallen a victim to the “ethical domain of nationalism.”<sup>83</sup> Like Binodini’s story, “the story of the nationalist emancipation is necessarily a story of betrayal. Because it could confer freedom only by imposing at the same time a whole set of new controls, it could define a cultural identity for the nation only by excluding many from its fold.”<sup>84</sup> Chatterjee clearly established his point that throughout her life, Binodini tried to defy such exclusions and felt betrayed as she failed gain societal recognition. However, Binodini’s autobiography became a document, not only of betrayal but also of her constant struggle to keep her right over her own body. Born in the lower class slum of Calcutta, Binodini learned a different discourse of female body from her childhood. She lived among people who were actresses, singers, or prostitutes. At the age of eight, she started her job in a theater group and started her acting career. Acting provided an emotional outlet and intellectual challenge for her.<sup>85</sup> Paradoxically, her female body was the source of her victory and defeat. In her autobiography, she mentioned how she reined the stage as an incontestable queen, and maintained a luxurious life

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<sup>81</sup> Murshid, *Rashundari Theke Rokeya: Nari Pragatir Aksho Bachar (From Rashundari to Rokeya: Hundred Years of Women’s Progress)*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993), 116.

<sup>82</sup> Chatterjee has succinctly discussed Binodini’s *My Story* in his *The Nation and its Fragments*. In her autobiography, Binodini writes about her life as an actress, her reasons for accepting the position of concubinage to wealthy men and the sufferings and betrayals she experienced. At the same time, her narrative also becomes a historical document about Bengali theater.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>85</sup> For background information, I am using Sumanta Banerjee’s *Dangerous Outcast: The Prostitute in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), and Rimli Bhattacharya’s *Binodini Dasi* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).

under the protection of various wealthy patrons. Her only desire was to reconstruct her reputation as a benefactor of Bengali theater. For this, she even agreed to become a mistress of a certain wealthy man who promised to build a new theater for her. She justified her action in the following words: “Since God has given me the means to earn my living, and if I am capable of taking care of myself and the expenses of my family through my physical exertions, I need not add to my burden of sins by selling my body and torment myself.” She expressed her desire for economic freedom by establishing a theater: “If a playhouse could be put together through my offices, then it would forever afford me a source of sustenance.”<sup>86</sup> However, the patrons of Bengali theater considered it indecent to name a theater after a prostitute. Hence, Binodini completely lost her fight to regain her right over her body. Binodini’s story is, therefore, about a woman who constantly fought to retain her rights over her body and repeatedly failed because her body did not belong to the traditional norms of the nationalist culture.

Nawab Faizunnesa’s *Rupjalal* was published in 1876, one year after the publication of Rashsundari’s *Amaar Jiban*. Her brief, emotional expression records a woman’s sexual and psychological concerns.<sup>87</sup> If Rashsundari’s autobiography can be read as a document of a woman’s physical and spiritual submission, Faizunnesa’s life can be read as a woman’s attempt to challenge the patriarchal institution that was trying to recast her as a submissive object, while her story in *Rupjalal* portrays how a woman’s challenging voice has to give in to society’s demand. The female characters in the text express their concerns about their bodies, sexuality, and desire. Faizunnesa makes it quite clear in her preface that the text has resulted from her frustration over a failed marriage. She complains about polygamy and criticizes the co-wife for making her life miserable. At the same time, the heroine of her text learns to comply with patriarchal notions of sexual submission and acknowledges male superiority in the society by surrendering to a polygamous husband. In both cases, the writer and her female protagonist represent resistance before being marginalized.

In *The Nation and Its Fragment*, Chatterjee’s discussion of Bengali women’s texts aimed at tracing “the genealogy of the nationalist con-

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<sup>86</sup> Binodini Dasi, *My Story*, trans. & ed., Rimli Bhattacharya in *Binodini Dasi: My Story and My Life as an Actress* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).

<sup>87</sup> See my translation of the preface.

struct” of the newly reformed women.<sup>88</sup> His discussion however, remained incomplete because of his exclusion of a Muslim woman’s text. If the nationalist period could be interpreted in terms of the patriarch’s denial of women’s rights over their bodies, then the Muslim women in colonial India experienced manifold denials. Just as Chatterjee excluded them from the domain of his postcolonial discourse, the nationalist patriarch of the colonial period had also excluded them from their traditional norm; even though the Muslim patriarchal authority of this period was initiating the movement to modernize their women, the modernization ideology also sought to legitimize its dominance over the women.<sup>89</sup> As a result, a Muslim woman, being legitimized as subject of a new patriarchy, redefined her female body in terms of social denials and adapted herself with this existence through negation by living and dying in *purdah*. For example, in *Abarodhbashini (The Secluded Ones, 1929)*<sup>90</sup> Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain reported the following incidents:

#### Report Eight

Once, a house caught fire. The mistress of the house had the presence of mind to collect her jewelry in a handbag and hurry out of the bedroom. But at the door, she found the courtyard full of strangers fighting the fire. She could not come out in front of them. So, she went back to her bedroom with the bag and hid under the bed. She burnt to death, but did not come out. Long live *purdah*!

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<sup>88</sup> Chatterjee, 151.

<sup>89</sup> In *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal*, Sonia Amin does a brilliant analysis of the Muslim women’s struggle of this period. She mentions that the Muslim Patriarchy was also working to provide its women a tradition-based modern ideology. The difference was that while Hindu and *Brahmo* Reformist based their ideology of tradition on pious and virtuous mythical figures of a Sita, Savitri, or on the powerful image of the goddess Durga and Kali, the Muslim Reformers alluded to the Muslim women like Ayesha (the prophet Muhammad’s wife, respected for her piety and her devotion to God and her husband), or Fatima (the prophet’s only daughter, well known for her patience and intelligence). Like their Hindu Reformers, the Muslim patriarch also thought that “Women had to be both the proof of the community’s modernity and its fortress against the denigrating onslaught of that modernity, which if not countered would obliterate the Indian’s cultural existence” (31).

<sup>90</sup> *The Secluded Ones* is a collection of anecdotes documenting the harmful effect of *purdah* system in Muslim households. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was considered one of the pioneer feminists in colonial Bengal. In her writings, she represented Muslim women’s sufferings in the name of religious restrictions and criticized the middle class Muslim intellectuals and social leaders for their failure to reform their notion of womanhood. She then asked Muslim women to be self-sufficient through education and employment. In fact, Rokeya was the first woman to speak for (educated middle class) women’s economic independence. A detail discussion on Rokeya can be found in

## Report Fourteen

An aunt of my husband was going to Patna from Bhagalpor; she was accompanied by her maid only. At Kiul Railway junction, they had to change trains. While boarding the train, my aunt-in-law stumbled against her voluminous burqa and fell on the railway track. Except for her maid, there was no other woman at the station. The railway porters rushed to help her up, but the maid immediately stopped them by imploring in God's name not to touch her mistress. She tried to drag her mistress up by herself but was unable to do so... The Begum's body was smashed—her *burqa* torn. A whole station full of men witnessed the horrible accident—yet none of them was permitted to assist her.<sup>91</sup>

In both incidents, social customs proved bigger than (Muslim) women's lives. These incidents show that Muslim culture in India institutionalized a woman's body in terms of denial and imprisoned her in the "silent substratum of the social order."<sup>92</sup> At the same time, the Muslim woman as a foreign body was also rejected by the Hindu women of all classes and castes. Hossain mentioned in her *Abarodhbashini* that Muslim women in their long veils were feared as ghosts by children. And, the Hindu mothers, trying to "hush their crying babies," would point at some Muslim women walking by: "hush, child hush. Look, those are Mecca and Medina. See, those hooded witches—they are Mecca and Medina."<sup>93</sup> Ironically, these exclusions support the argument that the nationalist period can be interpreted in terms of women's loss over their bodies; and in Muslim women's case, the recasting demanded total annihilation.

When a nation's identity lay dependent on its womanhood, the image of that womanhood became more important than reality. In fact, to put it in Uma Chakaravarti's words, "the image came to be perceived as the reality."<sup>94</sup> The reality of a woman's physical existence then became an anecdote in the writings of some defiant women like Faizunnesa, who tried to speak for themselves before disappearing, "not

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Sonia Nishat Amin's *The World of Muslim Women*, Roushan Jahan's *Sultana's dream* and Ghulam Murshid's *Reluctant Debutante*.

<sup>91</sup> Roushan Jahan, ed., & trans., *Sultana's Dream and Selections from the Secluded Ones* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1988), 26–27.

<sup>92</sup> Irigaray, "Women-Mothers, the silent Substratum of the Social Order," in Margaret Whitford, ed. *The Irigaray Reader* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 47.

<sup>93</sup> Jahan, 32.

<sup>94</sup> Uma Chakaravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" in Sangari and Vaid, eds. *Recasting Women* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), 78.

into the pristine nothingness, but into the violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization.”<sup>95</sup>

*History of (Bengali Muslim) Sexuality in Literary Culture*

Sexuality in the Bengali Muslim literary texts came mainly in three forms: religiosity, obscenity, and prohibition. Amin<sup>96</sup> mentions in her book that the Islamic discourse on sexuality had evolved from the texts written by Persian Islamic theorists, like Imam Bukhari and Ghazali.<sup>97</sup> Bukhari’s book was about *Hadith* (the religious instructions of the prophet), while Ghazali’s book dealt with the regulations of women’s sexuality.<sup>98</sup> By the early nineteenth century, Bengali translations of Bukhari and Ghazali became popular, inspiring the Bengali Muslim clerics to create a genre of conduct books for women in Bengal. Influenced by the Ghazalian theory, religious clerics and male literati started publishing books on sexual conduct. Bengali writers then translated those books from Urdu with the intention of enlightening Muslim women with the knowledge of the virtues of domesticity, chastity, piety, and submission.<sup>99</sup>

In the eighteenth century, a new genre of sexual texts had already emerged, claiming expertise on ethical aspects of conjugal life. In reality, these texts were nothing but instructional manuals elaborating the various ways of consummating marriage. The texts had titles such as *Rati Shastra (Love Manual)*, or *Kama Shastra (Sex Manual)*, or *Nikah Mangal*

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<sup>95</sup> Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Grossberg and Nelson, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985?), 278.

<sup>96</sup> Amin, 65.

<sup>97</sup> According to Ghazali’s theory, woman is a progressive, yet “negative force capable of destroying the social order by unleashing chaos.” Man, on the other hand, is a passive agent, working to keep the society in order by ensuring the satisfaction of a “woman’s sexual needs through the regulated and legitimate channel of marriage” (Amin 66).

<sup>98</sup> Mernissi’s analysis of Ghazali’s theory fits perfectly well in the nineteenth century Muslim social context of Bengal. Muslim Clerics and intellectuals of Bengal redefined Bengali Muslim women mainly according to Ghazali’s view. This is why I find Mernissi so functional in my reading of Bengali Muslim women’s texts.

<sup>99</sup> For the history of Bengali Muslim literature, see Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas O Bangla Shahitya* (Muslim Mentality and Bengali Literature); Sen, *History of Bengali Literature*; Amin, *The World of Muslim women*, and Minault, *Secluded Scholars*.

(*The Blissful Wedding*).<sup>100</sup> This literary tradition eventually paved the way for conduct books for Muslim women. The most popular instructional text was Ali Ahmed Arjan's *Lajjatunnesa* (1897), which illustrated sexual consummation, described various sexual diseases and the remedies, and reprimanded the faithless women for spreading diseases among men. Amin rightfully comments about this text that Ahmed Arjan was "over-anxious to enlighten his male readers of the pleasures of sex as well as the latent dangers therein."<sup>101</sup> This newly formulated genre gained its ultimate popularity in 1905 with the publication of Ashraf Ali Thanawi's *Behesti Zewar*, or *Heavenly Ornaments*.<sup>102</sup> The book, according to Barbara Metcalf, "was meant to be a complete education of a respectable Muslim girl or woman."<sup>103</sup> For the Muslim reformists, the book became an instruction manual on Muslim women's reformation as it aimed at guiding the new Muslim women to preserve "tradition, religion and purity."<sup>104</sup> Even a social reformer, like Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, considered the book useful and included it in the syllabi at her school.<sup>105</sup> *Behesti Zewar* was translated from Urdu into Bengali in 1925 and became for Muslim women the second most important book beside the Koran. However, in reality, Thanawi's book was nothing but a restatement of the Ghazalian theory of that positioned women as the epitome of domesticity, danger, and virtue.<sup>106</sup>

Thanawi's theory that women should be pious, disciplined, obedient, and devoted in their functions as housebound daughter/wife/mother corresponded to the Victorian notion of virtuous women. With some

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<sup>100</sup> See, Amin, 62–67.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>102</sup> Thanawi, or Thanavi (1864–1943), studied at the Deoband Muslim institution (generally known as madrasa) in Delhi. This school followed the religious reformation preached by the eighteenth century reformers like Shah Waliullah (1703–1762) and his son, Shah Abdul Aziz (1746–1824). These reformers emphasized scriptural explanation of religion. The aim of this school was to seek purity of personal religious practice and to spread Islamic law widely among Indian Muslims. Thanawi realized the importance of a native language in spreading any form of knowledge. Since Urdu was the 'elite' language among Indian Muslims, he decided to preach Islamic law by writing books in Urdu. For a discussion, see Minault, 60–71.

<sup>103</sup> Barbara Metcalf has translated the book, focusing on the sections relating to Muslim women, in *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's Bihisti Zewar* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>104</sup> See Amin, 51.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

revisions, the new Muslim woman was meant to resemble the ideal English girl:

who could be trusted alone if need be, because of the innate purity and dignity of her nature, but who was nether bold in bearing nor masculine in mind; a girl who, when she married, would be her husband's friend and companion, but never his rival ... who would make his house his true home, and place of rest ... a tender mother, an industrious housekeeper, a judicious mistress.<sup>107</sup>

In the nineteenth century, to warn Muslim women about the dangers of the world, Urdu reformist writers (like Nazir Ahmed<sup>108</sup> and Altaf Hossain Hali)<sup>109</sup> produced novels portraying heroines who became the embodiment of piety, discipline, and restraint—qualities which were “regarded as typical Victorian middle class attitudes.”<sup>110</sup> In the novels of both writers, Queen Victoria even appeared in several occasions “as the ultimate role model. She is the exemplary woman, not only educated and skilled at administration, but also a loyal and obedient wife, prolific mother, and sorrowing widow.”<sup>111</sup> A similar trend followed in Bengal as writers focused on explaining, in fictional form, the reward of female virtue. Meer Mosharrif Hossain's *Ratnabati* (1869),<sup>112</sup> Najibur

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<sup>107</sup> Eliza Lynn Linton's description of the ideal English woman fits so perfect here that Thanawi's *Beheshti Zewar* appears almost like a colonial propaganda of the woman question. See Linton, “The Girl of the Period,” (*Saturday Review*, March, 1868), 356–357, reprinted in *Collected Works of Eliza Lynn Linton* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956).

<sup>108</sup> Nazir Ahmed (1833–1912), a graduate of Delhi College, became a teacher of Arabic in Punjab and was given the position of a Deputy Inspector of schools because of his loyal service to the British during the mutiny in 1857. His first novel, *Miratul-Arus* (*The Bride's Mirror*, published in 1869) was a conduct book about two sisters of a respectable family. The comparison is drawn between a vicious elder sister who creates trouble and chaos, and a virtuous younger one who acts as the very model of the Muslim woman in India. For a detailed discussion, see Minault, 30–36.

<sup>109</sup> Hali (1837–1914) wrote in his *Majalis-un-Nissa* (assembly of Women, published in 1874) about the triumph of a virtuous woman. Like Nazir Ahmed, Hali also expressed his belief that women should be educated; however, none of them could go beyond the notion that education was only a means to improve women's functions within the domestic sphere. Both Hali and Ahmed received recognition from the British Indian Government for their pro-Victorian attitude toward women. Minault has discussed these writers in detail in Minault, 30–57. Also see Azra Ali, 10–23.

<sup>110</sup> Minault, 46.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>112</sup> Hossain's *Ratnabati* (1869) is considered the first Bengali fiction by a Muslim writer. He however earned his fame through his satirical essays, plays, and one historical narrative of epical grandeur. Amin has included Hossain in her discussion Bengal Muslim literati in her book. My observation, however, is based on my readings of various books on the history of Bengali literature written in Bengali; for example, see

Rahman's *Gariber Meye* (*Poor Man's Daughter*, published in 1923), and *Anwara* (1914), Kazi Imdadul Huq's *Abdullah* (1932), and Ismail Hos-sain Shiraji's *Raynandini* (1916) were some of the popular fictions in a Bengali household.<sup>113</sup> These novels followed the tradition established by Hali and Ahmed in portraying heroines "who were stoic in suffering, and chaste in the face of all adversity, never losing their feminine charm."<sup>114</sup> Thus, the reformist ideology of colonial Muslims in India reconstructed its woman as what Amin called "a lofty, pure, bountiful being, respectable of many virtues." She was divested of her threatening sexuality and even her sensuality which found favor earlier, to suit the needs of [a]reconstructed middle class culture that "fed on puritan values."<sup>115</sup>

Even though the woman question in colonial Bengal originated from women's involvement in education and literature,<sup>116</sup> the conservative attitude of Muslim society made it difficult for its women to be a part of the movement from its beginning. In her seminal work, Amin has undertaken the task of recording the contributions of Bengali Muslim women writers in the nineteenth century giving Faizunnesa the credit "of writing the first full length book in modern times" and comparing her with prominent Muslim writers, like Meer Mosharraf Hos-sain and Qazem-al Qureshi, popularly known as Kaikobad.<sup>117</sup> Despite Faizunnesa's adherence to the traditional hybrid style<sup>118</sup> popular in the eighteenth century, her usage of sexuality and the common themes of love, war, and polygamy in *Rupjalal* can be interpreted as rebellious, and in fact, more transgressive than any of her contemporary Muslim

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Motahar Hossain Sufi, *Bangla Shahityer Itihas* (Dhaka: Puthighar Publishers, 1976) and Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas O Bangla Shahitya*.

<sup>113</sup> Motahar Hossain Sufi comments that Shekh Abdur Rahim (1859–1931), Reazuddin Ahmad Mashadi (1860–1918), Munsif Meherullah (1861–1907) and other Bengali writers were mostly motivated by religion and Muslim culture.

<sup>114</sup> Amin, 112.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Press, 1986), 83–87. Also see Amin, 135–146 for discussions on Muslim women's education in colonial Bengal.

<sup>117</sup> Amin, 235.

<sup>118</sup> The hybrid literary tradition was most common in the writings of Muslim authors who tried to amalgamate the [Hindu] Bengali traditions of myths and legends of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the folk tales of Bengal with the Muslim literary traditions borrowed from the Perso-Arabic culture. The intention here was to create an Indo-Islamic literary culture. See Ahmed, ed. *Understanding Bengal Muslims*. Also, see Amin, 211–213.

male writers. Faizunnesa exposed the limitations of the society, even if indirectly, by focusing on the specific threatening sexuality of women. Later, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain modified Faizunnesa's fictional representation of women's condition into a direct critique by setting up her own school and by writing fictions and critical essays on the issues of the 'Muslim' woman question. Hossain initiated her reform movement with *Sultana's Dream* (1905), a short fiction, where she allegorized Bengali Muslim women's dream of (personal and political) freedom; then her approach became critically conscious about women's sufferings behind the veil, an issue which was her primary focus in *Abarodhbashini (the Secluded Ones)*, (1929), and it added strength to her already powerful voice in *Padmarag* (1924), a feminist fiction in which the female characters bring forth issues challenging patriarchal domain.<sup>119</sup>

While Bengali (male) Muslim writers produced moralistic and instructional novels suppressing the complex issues, like (religiously) unethical relationships and emotions, with the aim of reforming society by upholding chaste love and domestic virtue, they pressured the newly rising female authors not to forget their duty to uphold the social order. As a result, apart from the above mentioned women, none of the Bengali Muslim women writers had the courage to challenge the normative code of the middle class. Instead, they "depicted romantic love in a domestic setting,"<sup>120</sup> and advocated what Amin called a "deliberate desexualization on the part of the women concerned."<sup>121</sup>

### *Crossing Genre: Rupjalal and Bengali (Muslim) Literary Traditions*

In *Rupjalal*, Faizunnesa deals with a traditional folk/fairy tale plot. The plot structure and the narrative technique are clearly influenced by popular romance narratives (known as *mangalkabya*) of the early seventeenth to the late eighteenth century. The epic tales of the *Ramayana*

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<sup>119</sup> For a critical analysis of Rokeya's life and works, see Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante*, Amin's *The World of Muslim Women*, Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, and Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India*.

<sup>120</sup> Amin, 261–262. Amin has done a very insightful analysis of Bengali Muslim women writers. She explains (with textual references from the works of early Bengali women novelists who only started writing from the early twentieth century) how these writers were bound by their social obligations to represent pictures of women as prescribed by their male predecessors.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

and the *Mahabharata* also have significant influence; most of all, *Rupjalal* bears a strong resemblance to *The Arabian Nights*. The main story revolves around Prince Jalal, who falls in love with Rupbanu, a merchant's daughter. A giant, named Fortas, murders Rupbanu's father and abducts her. Jalal has to undertake a long and perilous journey in order to find and destroy Rup's abductor. On his dangerous journey, he fights demons and ogres, suffers imprisonments, marries a princess to earn his freedom, risks his life to save others, and finally returns to his beloved after killing the giant. Prince Jalal then marries Rup and returns home to live a happy life. His guilty conscience makes him confess to Rup about his other marriage, and he decides to act like a responsible husband. With Rup's permission, Jalal brings his other wife home, lives happily with his two wives, and earns fame as a righteous king.

The story is told partly in poetry and partly in prose. The poetry section follows the tradition of Bengali lyric poetry, which is then blended with the Muslim literary traditions of Bengal. Faizunnesa combines Hindu mythology, Muslim battle stories, Bengali folk tales, and Perso-Arabic fairy tales in narration. *Rupjalal* does not belong to any specific genre. Based on its narrative method, critics have defined it as a "hybrid work composed in both medieval and modern literary conventions."<sup>122</sup> Part of it is written in "sing-song verse" intermingled with prose.<sup>123</sup> It is a "romantic tale written in a mixed language."<sup>124</sup> This style of writing in mixed language was the invention of Bengali Muslim writers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Such writings showed influence of both Indian and Islamic culture and reflected the writer's access to various literary sources. Faizunnesa's work also reflects the wide range of her knowledge as she borrows from various foreign and indigenous sources, maintains a specific poetic pattern for most of the time, and follows the traditions typical of a mixed or hybrid text.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, she crosses the generic boundary by intermingling prose with poetry, myth with reality, and fiction with autobiography.

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<sup>122</sup> Amin, 216.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Mobasher Ali, "Nawab Faizunnesa and Rupjalal," in *Rupjalal Centennial Journal* (Comilla, 1976), 56–58.

<sup>125</sup> Such hybrid literature, commonly known as Islamic literature, mostly centered on Islamic history, myth, and superstition, tended to glorify and at the same time popularize a remote cultural tradition. As a result, supernatural elements and fictitious incidents became abundant and realism seemed to have no connection with this genre. For a discussion on Islamic literature of the 17th and 18th century Bengal, see Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas*, 101–116 and Sen, 142–151.

Faizunnesa chose to write in Bengali and ordered Bengali to be used in both her house and office when her brothers opted for the Persian language.<sup>126</sup> She was a great collector of books, which inspired her to establish her own personal library, known as “Faizun Library.”<sup>127</sup> She was well read in Arabic, Persian, and Indian literature, along with the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the Koran, the Bible, and other religious works.<sup>128</sup> She was a regular subscriber to literary magazines, such as *Islam Procharok* and *Shudakor*.<sup>129</sup> The inspiration to publish *Rupjalal* came from Kali Prasanna Sen, editor of a Bengali literary magazine.<sup>130</sup> Faizunnesa was also a member of *Shakhi Shamiti*, a woman’s organization, which was founded by Swarnakumari Devi, the sister of Rabindranath Tagore, and a renowned woman novelist herself.<sup>131</sup> In *Rupjalal*, Faizunnesa has accumulated her knowledge about different religions and literary cultures. The text makes it clear that from her remote province, she was aware of the events that were taking place in colonial Bengal. Her connections with the literati in Calcutta reconfirm the fact that Faizunnesa was intellectually conscious and involved in the literary and cultural reformist movements of her time.<sup>132</sup>

Seventeenth and eighteenth century Bengali literature mainly evolved around three types of subjects: romance, historical fiction and religious historical writing. Romances had their sources from the Koran, the Bible, and local myths; the second category of writing based

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<sup>126</sup> Begum, 132. Begum mentioned that Faizunnesa’s older brother was also a writer, but he chose to write in Persian.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>129</sup> Mentioned in Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Shamoyik Patra* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy: 1961), 49.

<sup>130</sup> Begum, 76.

<sup>131</sup> Devi’s *Dipnirban* (*Extinguished candle*, 1868), claims to be the first fiction written by a Bengali woman. Women of the Tagore family were involved in the reform movement in nineteenth century Bengal. Devi wrote fictions on women’s issues while her daughter, Sarla Debi was known for establishing physical activity centers for men and initiating the movement to organize militant nationalist groups. See Karlekar, *Voices from Within* for a discussion on women of the Tagore family; also see, Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?” Swarnakumari Devi was the founder of *Shakhi Samiti* 1886, the first women’s organization set up by a woman. Roushan Begum and other Bengali critics have noted Faizunnesa’s involvement in Devi’s organization. They, however, could not explain the involvement any further. But the connection with the then renowned woman writer is sufficient enough to make a logical assumption that Faizunnesa was aware of the literary and political reform movement of colonial Bengal.

<sup>132</sup> Abdul Quddus writes in his *Alor Dishari* (*The Enlightened Guide*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1979) that Faizunnesa used to spend a few hours in her library everyday.

its sources on local myths of Bengal, and the third, on the historic legends of Perso-Arabic culture. *The Arabian Nights* was translated into Bengali around 1830<sup>133</sup> and became a popular source-material for the Muslim authors.<sup>134</sup> The book had a tremendous influence in the making of the mixed Islamic literary culture in Bengal. Ferdousi's *Shahnama* was also translated into Bengali around the same time. *Persian Tales* and *History of Persia* were available in Bengali in 1834.<sup>135</sup> Ghazali and other theologians were also published in Urdu and Bengali. Earlier, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Muslim writers borrowed their sources from Islamic legends and battle stories. Another genre gaining popularity during this time was the Romantic tales. The notable Bengali Muslim poets of seventeenth century, Doulat Kazi and Alaol,<sup>136</sup> wrote love poems. Kazi's *Lore Chandrani* and Alaol's *Padmabati* are full of allusions from Persian, Arabic, Hindu, Sanskrit and Bengali myths and cultures.<sup>137</sup> Bengali poets wrote battle stories in the light of *Mahabharata*. Known as "janganama," these battle stories narrated the heroic battles of Muslim rulers, the prophet, his uncle, his two grand sons, and his followers. The earliest known "janganama" was written in 1645, and in the eighteenth century, the genre gained popularity in the hands of Hayat Mamud.<sup>138</sup> Mamud also translated Persian theological treatises and religious stories.<sup>139</sup> The Persian writer Nasiruddin Jami was another influential figure. His romance narrative, *Yusuf-Jolekha*, and his *janganama* were translated into Bengali by Garibullah in 1792. Amir Hamza translated the tales of *Hatem Tai* and wrote *Jaiguner Punthi* (*Jaigun's Book*, 1804) and *Madhumalati* (1788).<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> One Mafizuddin Ahmed of Dhaka translated it in 900 pages, and the book had several editions within a very short period of time. This indicates the popularity of *The Arabian Nights* in Bengal. See Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas*, 67.

<sup>134</sup> Sen points out that Arabian and Persian tales were among the first few books translated into Bengali. The Bengali version of the Bible was published in 1808 by William Carey and his Bengali assistants. Later, the translated versions of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Lamb's Tale from Shakespeare* were also published. See Sen, 141.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 187–190.

<sup>136</sup> See Sen, 137–146, for an analysis of early Muslim poets of Bengal.

<sup>137</sup> Anisuzzaman, 118.

<sup>138</sup> Mamud published his work in 1723. See Sen, 137–146.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Laily Majnu*, *Hatem Tai*, and *Yosef Jolekha*, were some of the popular romantic tales; note that all are named after the hero and the heroine, and all take their subject matter from Perso-Arabic and biblical sources. Local romantic tales were based on both Hindu and Islamic themes. For a discussion on literature of Muslims in Bengal, see Sen, *History*

Hindu myth and literary culture became an integral part in Islamic writing. Both the Hindus and Muslims in Bengal shared the same cultural traditions and traditional stories. As a result Hindus believed in Islamic syncretic custom: *Pir* and *Sufism* for example, and Muslims believed in the Hindu deities of *Mansa*,<sup>141</sup> *Shitala*,<sup>142</sup> and many others. Muslim literature also alludes to and sometime shares the tales of Krishna, Radha, Sita and many other tales from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Like Doulat Kazi, Alaol, Hayat Mamud, Garibullah, and Syed Hamza, Hindu writers, such as Bharat Chandra Ray, also influenced Muslim writers in Bengal. His *Rasmanjari* (*Buds of Emotion*, 1750) and *Vidyasundar* (1753) had influence over romantic tales written by Muslim writers.<sup>143</sup>

As mentioned earlier, *Rupjalal* is written partly in *punthi*<sup>144</sup> style and partly in prose. The main characteristics of this style are: the invocation to God (and the prophet and his family, the writer's own family),<sup>145</sup> the tendency to glorify God/religion in description and glorification of battles, the tendency to describe woman's physical beauty (and deprive

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of Bengali Literature, and Basham, *A Cultural History of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>141</sup> The snake goddess; for a discussion on the Mansa cult and the folklore that evolved from it, see Sen, 73.

<sup>142</sup> The goddess of small pox and other diseases. According to the rural Hindu and Muslims belief the goddess Shitala was responsible for diseases like cholera and diarrhea. See Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas*, and Sen, *History of Bengali Literature* for discussions on the syncretistic traditions of Bengal.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 137–154. Also see Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 132–141.

<sup>144</sup> The literal meaning of the word *punthi* is a manuscript or a book. In Muslim Bengal, *punthi* was also known as *dobhashi* (*do* is a Bengali word for two, and *bhashi* is the adjectival suffix of *bhasha*, meaning language; the two languages that were normally combined in a Punthi were either Bengali and Persian or Bengali and Arabic. However, most of the time, the manuscripts were written in *Misrabhasha* or mixed languages), because of its style of combining more than one language or *bhasha*. Structured as narrative verse, *punthi* was meant to be recited, and it embraced the multicultural history of Bengal; as a result, writers of *punthi* inculcated in it history, literature, and cultures that came in contact with the colonial province. See Anisuzzaman, 108; Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*; Clinton Seely, "A Muslim Voice in Bengali Literature," in Ahmed, ed. *Understanding Bengal Muslims*, 132.

<sup>145</sup> Sen, 20–21. Sen notes that this was a common framework of religious poems in early Bengal. He mentions that the framework of religious Bengali poems shows resemblance to narrative poems or Western Indo-Aryan ballads. He notes the following common features of such writings: 1. beginning with a salutation to gods and goddesses followed by some account of the poet; 2. the hero and the heroine are presented to be temporarily under a curse; 3. descriptions of towns, courts; 4. descriptions of lovers' pleasures and pains (month by month description in the course of a whole year).

her of respect and/or self-esteem), the use of mixed languages and verse patterns, the frequent insertion of the writer's name throughout the text, and the usage of supernatural power. Faizunnesa's text has followed most of these traditions in the first part of *Rupjalal*. Her eulogy starts with God and ends with her tutor; the whole text is a narration of Jalal's battle and victory over evil; the subject matter rotates around woman as her beauty brings all the misfortunes in the text. Faizunnesa uses elements of the supernatural and fantasy, and also inserts personal voice in the text in order to summarize, explain, defend, or criticize her characters whenever she finds it necessary.

The verses are written in rhyming couplets (known as *payar* in Bengali), in four-lined rhyming verse known as *chaupadi*, or in three-lined verse (known as *tripadi*). The *payar* verses are end-rhymed while the *tripadi* verses are long couplets with two caesuras.<sup>146</sup> The *tripadi* and *chaupadi* verse patterns were common in early Bengali lyrical poetry (fourteenth to eighteenth century). The couplets and four-lined verse patterns were popular until Modhushudan Dutt introduced Bengali readers to blank verse.<sup>147</sup> Faizunnesa follows the Bengali tradition of lyrical poetry, along with the Islamic tradition of writing in mixed language; however, she does not make frequent use of Perso-Arabic language like her contemporary (or predecessor) male writers. She alludes to the non-Bengali sources (Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Urdu), borrows materials from the hybrid traditions, and writes a poetic narrative in her native language; this emphasis on her vernacular language and literature makes her text different from traditional literature produced by male writers of Muslim Bengal.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Such narrative poems were meant to be sung. The *payar* and *tripadi* were sung by leading performers while the assistants performed the chorus, known as *dohara* or *pali*. See Sen, 21.

<sup>147</sup> Dutt wrote an epic in blank verse, titled *Meghnadh Badha*, or *The Slaying of Meghnada* (translated by Clinton B. Seely in 2003). Dutt was a true product of both Bengali Renaissance and colonialism as he wrote in the vernacular, converted to Christianity and immigrated to England to live like a gentleman, tried to earn success as a writer in English, and then resumed his career as a writer of Bengali poetry and drama. See Murshid, *Life of Modhushushdan Dutt* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>148</sup> Faizunnesa's contemporary Muslim poets, such as Kaikobad (1857–1952) and Mozammel Huq (1860–1933) followed the same lyrical tradition even though their writing context was mostly based on Islamic culture of mixed vocabulary. Iswar Chandra Gupta (1812–1859) and many other Hindu poets of her time also wrote *tripadi* or *chaupadi* verses. See Anisuzzaman, 212–220, and Sen, 151–155.

The mixed style, or the *punthi* tradition, was the result of a tendency to Islamize Bengali language with excessive usage of the Arabic, Urdu, and Persian languages and cultures. Faizunnesa follows that tradition, and yet she deviates from it by interspersing her text with Hindu myths and folk-tales. Her work also shows influence of Bharat Chandra Ray's *Vidyasundar*,<sup>149</sup> which is a love story of a princess named Vidya and her beloved Sundar. There is a female accomplice, a florist, who helps the lovers communicate. *Rupjalal* also has a similar pattern as a florist and an elderly woman work as messengers for the lovers. Jalal resembles Sundar in physical beauty and prowess. Faizunnesa follows Ray's tradition in describing the hero's muscular appeal that attracts both the men and women around him.<sup>150</sup> Hindu myths of Radha and Krishna, stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, are also frequently alluded to in *Rupjalal*. Rup's physical beauty, her sufferings, and her love for Jalal are always compared with those of prominent women characters from Hindu mythology. As a result, *Rupjalal* becomes an emblem of colonial Bengal's cultural heterogeneity.

Bengali prose during Faizunnesa's time was flourishing through the writings of Vidyalkar, Vidyasagar, Bankim Chatterji, and Meer Mo-sharrif Hossain. By the time *Rupjalal* was published, Vidyalkar<sup>151</sup> had published his translations from Sanskrit didactic tales (1808), Vidyasagar's<sup>152</sup> texts and stories were published (between 1847 to 1860), the first fiction<sup>153</sup> in Bengali came out (in 1858), Hossain's *Ratnabati* and other writings were published, and most of Bankim Chandra Chatterji's prominent fictions were published (from 1858–1873).<sup>154</sup> Faizunnesa had access (through her personal library and her connection with the liter-

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<sup>149</sup> A poet of pre-modern Bengali literature. He wrote romantic tales, like *Vidyasundar* and *Rasmanjari*, during the second half of the 18th century, and had tremendous influence on 19th century Bengali writers. See Sen, 152–154.

<sup>150</sup> This was also common in the works of Muslim writers of 18th century. Garibullah's romantic tale *Yusuf Julekha* (1792) also describes the prophet Yoseph's physical beauty in great detail. See Anisuzzaman, 154–156.

<sup>151</sup> Vidyalkar was a teacher at Fort William College, founded by William Carey in 1800; the purpose of this college was to teach Indian languages to British writers of East India Company. See Sen, 171.

<sup>152</sup> Vidyasagar was also at Fort William College. He also wrote text books for the college. See Sen, 172, and Ghosh, *Bengali Literature* (New York: AMS Press, 1978).

<sup>153</sup> *Ataler Gharer Dulal* (*A Rich Man's Spoiled Son*, 1858) written by Peary Chand Mitra, was the first Bengali fiction. I have already mentioned that the first fiction by a woman writer (written by Swarna Kumari Devi) was published in 1868. See Sen, 209.

<sup>154</sup> Sen, 211–213.

ary circle in Dhaka and Calcutta) to this newly emerging genre.<sup>155</sup> Her use of prose narrative in the second section of *Rupjalal* can be interpreted as her attempt to write a fiction. In fact, her use of the vernacular language is so skillful in this section that Kailas Chandra Singha, a Bengali Historian, applauds Faizunnesa for writing in perfect Bengali.<sup>156</sup> The prose section focuses on the masculine vigor of her hero and develops like a fiction in itself, with its hero and other characters, who suffer, grow, and gain self-knowledge. It has its own plot (Jalal's bravery) and its own theme (Jalal's adventure and his cunning to solve other people's problems) and characters (Jalal, King Aardbell and his family, the seven brothers, the Glendoveer Prince, and many women characters), and its own structure (problems, climax, resolution). Faizunnesa shows her skill as a fiction writer here and creates her own style by including the newly formulated genre into her text. Her prose bears resemblance to both Vidyasagar's and Chatterji's writing, and gives her a distinct position in the literary circle as a pioneer Muslim woman writer of this genre.<sup>157</sup>

*Rupjalal* can also fall into the category of autobiographical narrative. Faizunnesa mentions in her preface that the inspiration to write this book has come from her own life. She narrates in prose her family history and her reasons for writing the text. She tells the reader the tragedy of her life (as a mother, a wife, and a co-wife) in poetic form as she narrates how she has been betrayed by a polygamous husband. As she weaves the plot of her text, the similarity between her own life and that of her heroine becomes apparent. The difference is only seen in their attitudes towards the social custom of polygamy. Rup, the fictitious character in the text, accepts the reality of polygamy and surrenders to

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<sup>155</sup> Quddus, 12.

<sup>156</sup> Singha, *Rajmala* (Calcutta, 1897). A Bengali that was not contaminated with foreign vocabulary was considered perfect. Most of her contemporary Muslim writers were writing in the mixed vocabulary. Anisuzzaman comments that a Bengali Muslim writer generally used at least two or three foreign words per sentence. See Anisuzzaman, 103. In comparison to that tradition, Faizunnesa's was perfect Bengali since she rarely included a foreign term in her writing.

<sup>157</sup> Begum cites Bengali critics who have compared Faizunnesa's prose style with Chatterji's. Begum herself considers Faizunnesa a prose writer of Vidyasagar's style. See Begum, 92–93. However, Faizunnesa deserves the credit as she emerges as a new (Muslim) woman in colonial context when quite a few Bengali Muslim men were writing prose. The only prominent Muslim writer of her time was Meer Mosharraf Hossain, whose *Ratnabati*, a fiction, was published in 1869. *Ratnabati* was also written under the influence of popular romantic tales of the time, in which case, it had thematic resemblance with *Rupjalal*. For a discussion on Hossain, See Anisuzzaman, 175–176.

the system to be happy, while the author refuses to accept that reality and chooses to live in separation. The fairy tale ending of *Rupjalal* clearly points out the Muslim social system in colonial Bengal that imposed a definition of happiness over its women to justify polygamy. Even though autobiography as a genre had seen its dawn in women's writing with the publication of Rashesundari Devi's *Amaar Jiban*<sup>158</sup> and had become popular among Hindu women writers,<sup>159</sup> it did not have a Muslim woman writer until Faizunnesa claimed to be writing a text under the shadow of her own life. At a time when writing was almost a sinful task for women in a culture that wanted to educate woman only to "make his house his true home, and place of rest" and train her to be "a tender mother, an industrious housekeeper, a judicious mistress,"<sup>160</sup> simply writing one's life story would be a rebellion against established values. Faizunnesa initiated that rebellion by writing, even if partially, her own story; in this context, *Rupjalal* deserves to be evaluated as an autobiographical work by a Muslim woman.

### *My Method of Translation*

As a translator, the other that I had to confront was a complicated one. Faizunnesa was complicated because the text that she created was in fact a product of her own translative knowledge. She borrowed from at least four different languages, various genres, and writing techniques. In order to approach her work, I decided to invite her in, instead of imposing too much of myself on her otherness. My technique was very simple. I translated it for the other (which is the original writer) as I translate the other for my readers. The original writer, being a Muslim woman, belonged to a restrictive society. Language was almost forbidden for her. Yet, she learned many languages and used them to prove her creativity. It was unthought-of for a Muslim woman to express ideas

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<sup>158</sup> The book has been translated into English by Tanika Sarkar in 1999. In a way, Sarkar has inspired me to revisit the pages of an old (and neglected) text and unravel its treasure for the academic world. She also gives a brief history on women's autobiographical writing in the 19th century. See her *Words to Win: The Making of Amar Jiban* (Delhi: Kali for women, 1999).

<sup>159</sup> Malavika Karlekar deserves credit for her seminal research work on Bengali women writers. In her *Voices from Within*, she analyses the origin of women's autobiographies in colonial India.

<sup>160</sup> See Linton, 356–357.

about desire, sexuality, or resistance. Faizunnesa defied the established linguistic barricade of her time by allowing her female characters to talk freely about their bodies and their sexuality. Language was her instrument for rebellion. As a translator, I realized that in this specific case, my task was to let the other be. For me, the other is what Levinas calls “an infinite being that cannot be thematized or reduced.” This other has a power to transcend my limited scope. “The other is veiled;” it is an enigma, “a being with enigmatic irreducibility.”<sup>161</sup>

For Spivak, “[T]ranslation is the most intimate act of reading. I surrender to the text when I translate .... The translator earns permission to transgress from the trace of the other—before memory—in the closest places of the self.” Spivak believes that the translator’s task is to “facilitate” the love (of/in reading) “between the original and its shadow,” and the translator facilitates this “love” better if she can speak of intimate matters in the language of the original.<sup>162</sup> The translator’s surrender to the rhetoricity of the original would retain the “literarity, textuality and sensuality of the writing,” and help her embrace the other through the intimacy of cultural translation.<sup>163</sup> Translations, especially translations of third world women’s texts therefore become a task of political intimacy/distance depending on the linguistic commonality between the writer of the original text and the translator. If one speaks the same language of the original text, she would recognize the reality of the other and thus can claim to have solidarity with women of other political/geographical terrain.<sup>164</sup> Thus, surrendering to the text, intimacy with the language, and the possibility to establish solidarity with the other woman enable the translator to recreate an accessible model of reality.

I have followed the following technique in my translation:<sup>165</sup> I have read the text in the original and translated without stopping. I have

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<sup>161</sup> See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 89.

<sup>162</sup> Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” in Venuti, ed. *The Translation Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 398–399.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> In the above mentioned essay, Spivak records her method of translation in the following words, “At first, I translate at speed. If I stop to think about what is happening to the English, if I assume an audience, if I take the intending subject as more than a springboard, I can not jump in, I can not surrender... when I have produced a version this way, I revise” (406).

read, sometimes a single line, or sometimes a stanza, and then I have translated as the passion and emotion came through me. I have revised after the initial spontaneous translation phase is over. I am not doing a word-by-word translation. I do not think such a literal linguistic transformation would have captured the emotion that is in the rhyme, image and context of the original. Because most of the original is written in verse, word-by-word translation would destroy the beauty of the poetic intimacy. Besides, the two languages are so different in syntactical and grammatical structures that a word-by-word translation would not do justice to the original. I therefore have attempted to follow the rhythm of emotion and the passion of language and culture instead of following a scientific method of translating. My main intention is to retain the structural beauty of the original; for that I have tried to follow the writer's sentiment. The text is written in simple but flowing poetic language. I have surrendered to the simplicity and the poetic mood of the original.

Translating a hundred and thirty year old text is not an easy task, especially when the text is written in a difficult format and in a complicated language. Bengali language has evolved since Faizunnesa in such a way that it would be very hard for many Bengali speaking people to decipher the meaning of the text now. One can never truly translate a text, only rewrite it. I attempted to recreate the poetic form of the text in English as closely as possible, and at the same time, I tried to keep the lexical sense of the poem untarnished. The rhyming pattern of the poem also added a challenge to my effort. Faizunnesa did not follow one specific rhyme scheme in her text; instead, she combined various styles. She wrote most of the verse in rhyming couplets. She also used three lined verse, with two rhyming half lines followed by a third line that rhymes with the sixth line. A part of such verse pattern is transcribed below to show the structural patterns in Bengali along with its recreated form in my translation:

*Hai hai priyotoma      kotha role pranoshoma*  
*Kotha role e jib-jiban?*  
*Hai hai keno eshe      bhongite amake neshe*  
*Nidoy holire pranodhon/*

Where are you, my dearest,      the beating of my heart?  
     Why have you captured my soul?  
 Why did you come hence,      to kill me with a glance?  
     Heartless you are, my life's jewel. (55)

Another pattern that Faizunnesa used is a four lined rhymed verse, which has two rhyming half lines, with the second line rhyming with the fourth. The pattern gets even more complicated as each half line hardly has more than three words. An example of the verse pattern is transcribed bellow:

<i>Krodhannito mon</i>	<i>korilo gomon,</i>
<i>Rakshas bhaban,</i>	<i>probeshe bhup</i>
<i>Hoye khedantor</i>	<i>bahir andar</i>
<i>Here ghore ghor</i>	<i>shea oporup/</i>

My translation of the above mentioned lines is as follows:

Blinded with rage	the King ravaged
The demon's palace.	With a wrathful heart,
He looked everywhere	for his daughter,
And every corner	of the fort he searched. (82)

In my translation, as the above cited examples show, I have tried to represent the poetic form of the original as closely as possible. I have used straightforward and unpretentious vocabulary in my translation in order to retain the candid simplicity of the original text. Faizunnesa made a wonderful blend of Sanskritized sophistication with the coarse conversational style of Bengali language. Her use of the unrefined language might be indicative of her reaction to/rebellion against the Muslim patriarchal institution since the style is frequently used in describing sexual confrontations, depressions, and sufferings of her characters.<sup>166</sup> I did not replace her vulgar Bengali with refined English; instead, I followed her technique and tried to recreate the impact she intended to create by juxtaposing a highly refined vocabulary with a frankly sexual one.

Faizunnesa's text is divided into three parts: the first and the third part are written in verse form, and the second section is written in

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<sup>166</sup> Sumanta Banerjee describes the making of a middle class Bengali culture through the marginalization of cultural forms of the lower class and the emergent bhadra-mahila's literary voice. He shows how women were tied into the process of cultural homogenization of the urban middle class. Such cultural differences imposed segregation on women. Women of the middle class were different from lower class women because they are no longer allowed to share the same literary culture. Lower class women were free, and could use lewd sexual language. For the middle and upper-class, everything was refined, coated with [Victorian] virtues and piety. Faizunnesa seems to be violating that norm by placing the low and the high literary culture together. See Banerjee, *The Parlor and the Street: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989), 132, and his *Dangerous Outcast* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2001).

prose. There are no specific chapter divisions mentioned in the text; however, Faizunnesa uses subtitles based on the subject matter of a poem, or of her prose narrative, which helps her maintain the structural unity of the work as it breaks up the bulk of work into various sections. She also lists her subtitles in her contents. Because of the size and complicated writing pattern, I found it difficult to maintain the structural clarity of the text unless I changed the framework; for that, I divided the text into three books, each book with several parts, and each part with several sections. I gave each part a title, and kept Faizunnesa's subtitles for sectional divisions of the text. I used her subtitles as chapter divisions in Book Two, which is written in prose form. There were situations when I found it necessary to break a long section into new subtitled sections in order to save my readers from confusion and, at times, boredom.

A word-to-word translation would surely destroy the enormous appeal of the text. I therefore used my transgressive power of intimacy to capture the "literarity, textuality, and sensuality" of the text. At times I translated each word, or each line; at times, when the imagery or the expression was too complicated, I had to use more words or lines than Faizunnesa originally used in her own text. I also captured the meaning of text in some cases and translated that meaning. In addition, there were moments when I read a section and felt the emotion, and I became enamored of it so overwhelmingly that translation came as a passionate outburst. Being a Muslim woman from the same geographical context, I could connect through her to my ancestors. As a post-colonial/third world woman subject, I always exist "in translation."<sup>167</sup> Hence, by translating *Rupjalal*, I am not merely performing my task as a "native informant,"<sup>168</sup> or claiming to establish solidarity with a distant other; I am surrendering myself to the text, and in doing so, I am reliving history.

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<sup>167</sup> Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 186.

<sup>168</sup> Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 4.

CHAPTER TWO

TRANSLATION OF *RUPJALAL*

PROLOGUE

In the name of the Lord I begin my words.  
I praise the Lord, the Creator of three worlds.  
Angels, gods, and saints, among others  
Offer their lives and seek His grace;  
He sees with no eyes and hears by not hearing.  
With no heart, He feels our deepest feeling.  
With no hands He touches us, and also creates  
Good and evil, virtues and vices;  
Footless, He treads faster than the wind  
Through the world and our mind.  
He is nowhere, but is in each of us  
He is in every leaf and every blade of grass.  
Male and female each possesses two<sup>1</sup>  
Of the four things to create life anew.  
To four of His angels, He has given  
Orders—to supervise, guide, warn, and ruin.  
Gabriel and Michael look after worldly deeds;  
Israfel will blow the final trumpet.  
Azrael, the fourth one, takes our lives.  
Seven skies and heaven and hells,  
The sun and planets, moon and the stars,  
Everything announces the Creator's power.  
Next, I pay homage to the Prophet,  
Who will be my savior at the end.  
Power is given to the Prophet  
To save us on the day of Judgment.  
I pay respect to the four devotees,  
Abu baker, Omar, Osman, and Ali.<sup>2</sup>  
Abu baker deserves to be respected

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<sup>1</sup> Faizunnesa is invoking here the biological means of reproduction which is evenly distributed between man and woman (as it was a popular proverb in a Muslim household as well as in mystic folk songs of Bengali Islamic culture): man has penis and sperm, while woman has ovary and uterus. In a way, the author is indicating the equal rights of men and women.

<sup>2</sup> The first four disciples of Prophet Mohammad.

For being the first to believe the Prophet.  
 The valiant deeds of Osman  
 Are written throughout the verses of Koran.  
 Omar is renowned for his righteousness,  
 While Hazrat<sup>3</sup> Ali has the strongest hands;  
 He holds Fatima as his beloved spouse.  
 Prophet's daughter and angel she was.  
 God endowed her with every virtue.  
 I salute Fatima, and her two sons too.  
 I also respect my loving parents  
 For raising me with affection and grace.  
 I especially honor my mentor  
 Who lighted up the very core  
 Of my being. I was blind; he gave me eyes.  
 He made me patient, pious, and wise.  
 Srijut<sup>4</sup> Tazuddin Mian, he was called  
 May God bless his pious soul.  
 Now, I place my text before you,  
 My readers, and make this plea not to  
 Be harsh critics. Dear readers, please  
 Forgive the ignorant mistakes of a novice.

### *Introducing the Text*

#### *My Family History and My Reasons for Writing this Book*

*Family history*: It would take a whole book for this modern<sup>5</sup> writer to record her family history and the reasons that inspired her to write it down. Instead of burdening the readers with detail, I have decided to write briefly about my family before explaining the reasons that motivated me to undertake this task of writing a book.

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<sup>3</sup> An Arabic term used to show respect to the Prophet and the companions who followed him in his religious trips.

<sup>4</sup> *Srijut* or *Srijukto* was the Bengali word for "Mr." The feminine forms were *Srimoti*, or *Srijukta*. These were commonly used in Hindu middle class families; the middle class Muslim society generally used *Janab* or *Mian*, and *Bibi*, or Begum for men and women respectively. For a discussion on the rise of the middle class Hindu and Muslim literary culture, See Amin, *The World of Muslim Woman in Colonial Bengal*, 46.

<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that Faizunnesa claimed herself to be "*adhunik lekhika*", or a modern writer. The concept of modernism, as Amin notes in her book, was introduced in the nineteenth century by the reformist agenda of the *Brahmo Samaj* through its attempts to transform Bengali woman into a refined and enlightened *bhadramahila*, or lady. See Amin, 8–12.

My ancestor, Agwan Khan<sup>6</sup> worked as an Ameer<sup>7</sup> in the court of the Emperor Shah Alam<sup>8</sup> of Delhi. He was a very loyal subject and was able to please the Emperor with his service. Once the Emperor ordered him to go to Bengal and settle an ongoing political unrest. Accompanied by his own family, Agwan Khan took a troop of a hundred thousand soldiers to Bengal. After resolving the political problem, he decided to reside in Bengal for several years. He grew fond of this friendly province and decided to establish a connection with the people of that area. He therefore asked his son, Bhuru Khan, to marry the daughter of the *Zamindar* of Jahangirnagar. Agwan Khan then went back to Delhi and requested the Emperor to allot some provinces of Bengal to his son Bhuru Khan. Granting his wish, the Emperor conferred upon Bhuru Khan the ownership of Tripura, the eastern province of Jahangirnagar. Thus, Agwan Khan's loyal service to the Emperor earned an estate for his son, who became the *zamindar* of Tripura province. Bhuru Khan happily accepted his new role as a *zamindar* and managed his estates with skill.<sup>9</sup>

Bhuru Khan had a son named Masim Khan. His grandson, Hose-nali Chaturdhari,<sup>10</sup> married the daughter of another famous *zamindar*, Mozaffar Gazi Chaturdhari. Legend goes that Mozaffar Gazi was such a stern patriot that, preferring death over colonial subjection, he committed suicide when the British took over Bengal. This famous Mozaffar Gazi is my father's maternal grandfather. My father, Ahammedali Chaturdhari, was also very popular for his charity and kindness. He was a well-learned man. People even believed that he had a supernatural power to cure diseases and predict the future. He was on friendly terms with many British governmental officials who used to spend time as royal guests in our estates. Now, Asad Ali Chaturdhary, a *zamindar* of our neighboring province, was a distant relative of my father. Once, when my father went to visit this relative, he saw the eldest daughter of

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<sup>6</sup> Kailas Chandra Singha recorded in his *Rajmala* that Prince Agwan Khan was related to the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam (Bahadur Shah). Agwan Khan's son's name was Prince Bahroz, whom Faizunnesa introduces as Bhuru Khan.

<sup>7</sup> A consultant.

<sup>8</sup> Shah Alam II was the Mughal Emperor from 1761–1805.

<sup>9</sup> Singha also records the same incidents as he writes History of Tippera in his *Rajmala*.

<sup>10</sup> The title "Chaturdhary" eventually became Chowdhury, or Choudhury in Muslim Bengal. Faizunnesa used both versions in her description.

the *zamindar*, and fell in love with her. My father asked for her hand in marriage, and the *zamindar* happily consented. Four children were born out of that marriage; I am the third of them.

So far, I was drawing the happy and proud picture of my family, but now I want to disclose the sorrows and pains of my own life. I spent my girlhood happily, playing with my friends and taking lessons from my house tutors. Being a favorite of my parents, I always had the pleasure of doing whatever I liked; I never experienced pain. However, as God had different plans for me, my happiness met its end very soon. The problem began when my father started to have frequent visits from a young man named Mohammad Gazi,<sup>11</sup> whose mother was a distant cousin of my father. Mohammad Gazi lost his parents at a very tender age, and my father had a soft spot for this unfortunate young man.

It was during one of these visits that Mohammad Gazi saw me and fell in love instantly. He asked my father for my hand in marriage. Father consulted my mother, who refused the proposal right away because of my age.<sup>12</sup> I was very young then, almost a child. The young man left our estate with a broken heart. I heard later from people that he was really heartbroken because of the rejection and spent money on magicians and soothsayers to make them fulfill his wish to marry me. Many people tricked him and took huge sums of money from him, giving him false hopes about his marriage with me. He even lost interest in his estate. His estate officials then decided to resolve the problem by making an arrangement of his marriage, thinking that marriage would cure him of his infatuation.<sup>13</sup> At first he became furious, but then eventually he gave up and got married. However, it soon became obvious that marriage did not cure him. He

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<sup>11</sup> Mohammad Gazi Chowdhury was one of the most influential provincial rulers in Tippera, or Comilla at that time. for a brief biographical sketch, see Begum, *Nawab Faizunnesa*, 31–35.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 36. Begum notes that Faizunnesa was about nine years old at that time. Her mother displayed extraordinary courage in refusing a marriage proposal from a socially powerful man. The incident indicates Faizunnesa's mother's strong hold in the family. Ironically, it was the mother who accepted Chowdhury's second proposal for Faizunnesa seventeen years later, disregarding the fact that Chowdhury already had another wife. In her preface to *Rupjalal*, Faizunnesa blamed her mother for ruining her life. See my translation.

<sup>13</sup> Chowdhury's first wife, Nazmanna, was the daughter of a Chief Judge at Tippera. Court. The first marriage was childless and unhappy. Nazmanna later gave permission to her husband to marry and asked him to propose to Faizunnesa. See Begum, 20.

still obsessed about me even though he knew that it was now impossible for him to ask for my hand.

Now dear reader, listen to my sighs. No one can undo what the Lord Almighty decides to do. My misfortune deepened when my father became ill. He was suffering from tuberculosis. Thousands of gold coins were spent; physicians were brought from other parts of the country to treat him. But who can give life if the Lord takes the breath away? Our father thus left for heaven as we lamented his departure. We were grief-stricken; then eventually the illusions of *sansar* lured us, and we became busy with our lives forgetting about him. Wise people of the earth can explain it better than I can. I only ask, do wise people embrace immediate, transitory pleasures, disregarding the universal truth that lies in the remote future? One will suffer in hunger and crave for food, clothing, and shelter if one cannot earn his bread to keep his body safe. Similarly, one can suffer after death if one does not utilize the time of life to earn rewards for the life that awaits death. Greed conquers and controls all. Even the most powerful Emperors are not free from the grip of greed; after all, everyone lives for selfish reasons. Our father was a rich ruler. He had his offspring and well-wishers; but the truth is, no one followed him in his grave. All became busy with their own lives as the lonely soul set off for his own eternal journey.

*My reasons for writing this book:* After our father's death, our mother took over responsibilities of the estates. She had my eldest brother married to a girl of a respectable family. Everything went along peacefully in our home. My mother started receiving letters from many suitors who were asking her for my hand in marriage. That *zamindar*<sup>14</sup> also kept on bribing friends and officials of our estate to present him to my mother as a prospective groom. He continued strenuously to win my mother's approval and eventually succeeded in getting it. Mother had no experience about polygamy in her own life, so she disregarded his marital status. She only thought such a devoted suitor was sure to make her daughter happy.<sup>15</sup> Alas! The power of Destiny! No one has the power to question her even if she brings disaster! Thus, my mother easily overlooked my doomed future and sacrificed me in the name of marriage.

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<sup>14</sup> She is referring to Gazi Chowdhury.

<sup>15</sup> According to Begum, this decision was influenced not as much by the devotion of Gazi Chowdhury as it was by the problems that he was creating; in fact, he made it quite impossible for Faizunnesa to be married to anyone else. That was why Faizunnesa had an unusually late marriage. See Begum, 41.



The pain and misery that he gave me,  
 Words can never tell.  
 I don't know why I do not die  
 My life's a burning hell.  
 I made him father of two daughters  
 I offered him my whole life  
 He repaid with pain; what a cruel man!  
 He robbed me of my pride.  
 Readers, would you trust me if I say that he  
 Made me a miserable mother?  
 To give his other wife a blissful life  
 He gave her my older daughter!  
 My daughter and my husband,  
 Both I lost to her.  
 Losing all my bliss; I live in the abyss,  
 Of doleful sorrow, dear reader.  
 I took this pen to ease my pain  
 I want my readers to know,  
 How the happy life of Srimoti<sup>18</sup> Faizun  
 Became a tale of sorrow.

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<sup>18</sup> Agreeing with Partha Chatterjee, Amin explains in her book that the changing social context of women from the middle class became agencies of a reformist movement. She also points at the change in the titles of these women who, being constructed under the shadow of their Victorian sisters, were addressed as "*srimoti*, or *Srijukta*," the Bengali terms equivalent of Miss or Ms. Faizunnesa claims herself as a member of the conscious or awakened class by adding such titles with her name. See Amin, 11–12.

## BOOK ONE

### PART I. THE BEGINNING<sup>19</sup>

#### *The Birth of a Prince*

Faizunnesa starts the tale of love  
Of a man named Jalal and his beloved, Rup.<sup>20</sup>  
In a land named Shimal, King Jamal wore the crown.  
Surely he was the best of kings ever known.  
His queen, Kamalavati, had the beauty and grace  
That no other woman could ever surpass.  
Being of the same age, wit, and taste,  
The king and the queen were always content.  
In time, God's blessing also showered on her  
As she became pregnant with the future heir.  
For nine whole months, she remained frail,  
While the baby inside her grew well.  
In due time she gave birth to a son.  
The proud father commanded then,  
"My kingdom should celebrate  
The birth of my son." His order was obeyed.  
For five days and five nights long  
Maidens danced and sang merry songs.  
The king gathered the wisest of his men  
And asked them to give his son  
A name that would carry on his fame.  
All agreed to call him "Jalal,"<sup>21</sup> a name  
They thought had the flame of power

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<sup>19</sup> The structural division of the text into various books, parts, and numbered sections are my insertions. Faizunnesa divides her sections by using subtitles. I have kept her subtitles for each section and then organized the work into three books (each book has parts, sections or chapters) to maintain the coherence and clarity of a translated text.

<sup>20</sup> The naming of characters in the texts seems to represent the synchronized culture of Bengali-Muslim community. The hero is given a Muslim name, while the heroine's is a Bengali name. "Rup" is the Bengali word for "beauty." The two suffixes that are used with Rup, are "Banu," and "Boti;" the former is a Persi word indicating a respectful term for feminine gender, and the latter is a Bengali term, normally used to transform a noun into adjective to name a feminine gender. The word "Rupboti," for example, would mean "beautiful." Rup is addressed throughout the text as Rupbanu, Rupboti, or Banu. Rup's co-wife, Hurbanu, is also a Muslim character. Interestingly enough, Jalal's Father also bears a Muslim name, while his mother has a Bengali/ Hindu name.

<sup>21</sup> Jalal, a common name for a male child in the Bengali Muslim community, means 'respected.' See Qazi, *Book of Muslim Names* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1995), 24.

And patience, worthy of a future ruler.  
 The king asked Soothsayers to predict  
 The fortune of his prince. Astrologers said,  
 He'd be a great soldier. He'd rule his instincts  
 And make himself the equal of other great kings.  
 Mystic *Brahmins* expressed their view  
 That the prince would travel lands anew.  
 His early life would have adversity  
 But he would live the rest of his life happily.  
 The stars, however, had a presentiment  
 That with him had arrived the king's end.  
 This warning made King Jamal somewhat sad.  
 But knowing he had but to accept his fate,  
 He composed himself and decided to spend  
 His life with happiness, till the end.  
 His end came three years after that,  
 As a sudden illness put him to his final bed.  
 The mourning widow could not stand  
 The departure of her loving husband.  
 Days she spent in tears and grief.  
 Whatever she did, she could not believe  
 That the love of her life was forever gone.  
 Looking at her son, she became strong;  
 She accepted her duty and received the crown.  
 She decided to take good care of her son.  
 As she ruled the kingdom with grandeur,  
 Her fame as a ruler spread far and near.  
 She also wanted to see her son  
 Accomplish what his father had done  
 As a good king, and as a man of honor.  
 So, when the little prince turned four,  
 The Queen Mother appointed for him  
 The best of teachers one could find.  
 She wanted him to learn everything,  
 About every field of learning.  
 So, Prince Jalal learned to discern  
 The words of *Torah*, *Zaboor*, *Bible* and *Koran*.  
 He learned languages—Urdu, and Persian;  
 A philosopher he was, and a mathematician,  
 He learned logic and literature well;  
 In short, he became very knowledgeable.  
 His character ran hand in hand  
 With his wisdom. He was also grand  
 As an archer, and people used to say  
 His strength would put a lion in dismay  
 He grew so handsome at sixteen  
 That wherever he went, women were seen

Flocking around him; his manliness  
 Turned the meekest housewives into temptresses  
 And each of these women longed to be the one  
 To be loved by this handsome man!  
 No woman wanted to stay within,  
 And miss her chance of meeting him.  
 It would not be wrong if I surmise  
 That his beauty equaled Joseph:<sup>22</sup> this should suffice  
 And save me from writing a whole book  
 On Prince Jalal's appealing looks.

*Growing into a Man*

The way autumn clouds shape fickle dreams,  
 The way spring breeze sprouts new leaves,  
 The prince felt the same thrill inside.  
 As an ocean roaring with angry tide,  
 He spent his days not knowing why  
 He felt restless. The Queen Mother, with a sigh,  
 Told herself that he had become a man.  
 That he was ready to experience passion.  
 He could fall any moment into the dungeon of lust.  
 Having realized this, she knew that she must  
 Find him a wife. All her royal advisors were called,  
 And she asked them to send messengers abroad  
 In search of a suitable bride for Jalal.  
 Days went by and the messengers all  
 Came back as they couldn't locate  
 A woman worthy to be the prince's soul mate  
 The queen was worried while her eager son  
 Became impatient. He failed to reason  
 His physical urge and the burning passion.  
 Therefore, he took his own decision.  
 Who can ask, Lord, and who can answer  
 The questions about truth, or desire?  
 Only He knows, He who has power  
 To conceal or to uncover  
 The mysteries of this world and beyond.  
 Everything remains under His command.  
 Religion, works, heaven, and hell—  
 Everything remains under His spell.  
 He is not seen, but He is around;  
 In all His creations He can be found.

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<sup>22</sup> The reference here is to the Biblical character, Joseph.

He has given man the power of six senses:  
 To see, hear, touch, smell and taste  
 Besides these five is the sixth one,  
 Ruled by instinct and intuition.  
 A man has the power to gain  
 Self control through self-reasoning.  
 Happy is the man who knows how  
 To control the six senses, and bestow  
 On himself the feeling of peace  
 And the serenity of divine bliss.  
 Forgive then, Lord, this humble admirer,  
 Who is trying to fathom your magnanimous power.  
 But Prince Jalal became so blind  
 With desire, that he could not find  
 Peace in reason. He then made his plan  
 To make a journey to the farthest land  
 With the intention of hunting deer.  
 All realized what he wanted to hunt down  
 Was not a deer, but a doe-eyed woman.

*Prince Jalal Went in Search of a Bride*

Attendants, friends, and armored guards  
 Prepared to follow the prince's command.  
 The prince asked his mother for her permission  
 To begin his journey to the lands unknown.  
 He ordered his attendants to abide  
 By all the rules that he would provide  
 During the tour. Who could defy the only son  
 Of the king who himself was a mighty one?  
 The whole troop then moved along,  
 From land to mountain, and then beyond.  
 In the end, they reached a river  
 So dark and deep they thought it would never  
 Be possible for them to cross the perilous water.  
 Danger had so many faces there,  
 Crocodiles, snakes and alligators were  
 Waiting to feast on foolish travelers,  
 Who might try to cross that river.  
 Jalal and his men had no other  
 Choice but to sit idle on the shore  
 And wait for a miracle to happen yonder.  
 It seemed an eternity they had to wait  
 Until a fisherman in his little boat  
 Came to shore at the end of his day.

“Ferry us across the river and we’ll pay  
 You in gold,” said the Prince. The fisherman  
 Had a small boat. So he took them one by one,  
 Along with their horses, across the dark water.  
 The prince asked, “Tell us where we are,  
 Whose land is this? What is it called?”  
 “This place is called Omar Nagar,” he said,  
 “And it is the land of the hermit Omar,  
 A beautiful city beside a dark river.”  
 The fisherman left with his wage,  
 While Jalal and his men rode their horses.  
 They wished to see more of the beautiful realm  
 That called itself after its ruler’s name.

*In the Garden*

After riding for an aimless hour,  
 They came near a wondrous bower.  
 The prince asked his men to wait,  
 And alone he went towards the gate.  
 He had a sudden urge to go in  
 And view the beauty that lay within.  
 The moment he entered, he was spellbound;  
 The murmuring breeze with its inaudible sound  
 Deafened him. Light wind caressed his body  
 He was amazed by the serene beauty.  
 As he walked around that beautiful garden,  
 He considered himself a lucky man.  
 The branches stooped with fruit towards him;  
 Birds chirped, twittered, cooed, and hummed.  
 Roses, chrysanthemums, and jasmines  
 Lilies, gardenias and sweet-smelling vines,  
 Flowers of various shapes and splendor  
 Bedazzled him. In his heart he felt a fervor,  
 A pang, and a numbing pain.  
 The flowers, all bloomed, with buds-half open  
 With desire—he saw them all:  
 He saw flowers, red, pink, blue, and purple,  
 Divine white, and luxurious gold,  
 Bursting with color; spellbound, he stood.  
 Like bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds  
 That fluttered around the flowers in lust  
 For the nectars. The prince stayed there,  
 With a heart aroused with passion and desire,  
 And enjoyed the beauty of that blissful place.

As he strolled along, he suddenly came across  
 A gorgeous temple, with a lake up front.  
 Water lilies and handsome swans  
 Added grace to the glittering lake. The stairs  
 That ran from the temple to the crystal water  
 Were of marble, cold and white. To quench his thirst  
 The Prince wanted first to just touch,  
 Then drink the cool water. As he bent down  
 And reached for the water, he saw the moon.  
 The moon! He wondered, in broad daylight!  
 How could the moon come not at night,  
 But now, when the King of light still reigned the sky!  
 He wondered, why?  
 The lovely moon with all her glamour  
 Decided to outshine Nature's splendor  
 He thought he was in a time zone where  
 both day and night existed together  
 It was an impossible dream, he thought;  
 Unreal it was. He looked around and sought  
 An explanation; he moved up and down through those marble stairs  
 He looked up in the sky and down beneath the water.  
 Yet, his search was futile; suddenly, he heard something.  
 A rippling murmur was approaching him.

*Prince Jalal Saw Rupbanu*

Hearing a soft murmur coming near him,  
 Prince Jalal looked up and stood frozen in time.  
 A flash of light blinded his sight;  
 Was that a woman? Did he see right?  
 Or a fairy was it? An angel? A Goddess, who  
 Came down with a whim to visit anew  
 The beautiful earth? Being bored in her own  
 Divine home, with her aerial friends, she came down!  
 Was she Saraswati,<sup>23</sup> Laxmi,<sup>24</sup> or Rukmini?<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The goddess of knowledge according to Hindu Mythology. Unless otherwise mentioned, I have used George Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2003) for my references.

<sup>24</sup> Goddess of good fortune. She is the mother of the universe, the wife of Vishnu—the supreme being.

<sup>25</sup> One of the five favorite wives of Krishna.

Gauri<sup>26</sup> she could be, or Govinda's Kamalini.<sup>27</sup>  
 Satyavama<sup>28</sup> she might be, or Ram's Sita.<sup>29</sup>  
 That's what he thought, when he suddenly saw  
 A moon-face floating in the crystal water.  
 She surpassed all the beauties of nature.  
 This moon-faced woman with lotus eyes,  
 Enlightened the earth with her grace  
 As she walked along with her friends,  
 Holding a flower bouquet in her hands.  
 Which was prettier? Those flowers, or the woman?  
 She looked at him. And his senses left him then.  
 As if hit by lightning, unconscious he fell.  
 The moon-faced beauty was affected as well.  
 Her attendants saw her swooning away from them.  
 What should they do? They could not blame  
 Their lady for reacting that way. Even  
 They felt attracted to this handsome man.  
 They had no choice but to act with speed  
 To carry her home before scandal reached  
 Her. The Prince woke up only to find  
 That his angel had fled, leaving him behind.  
 Was that a dream? Or was she really there?  
 The fragrance of flowers that she left in the air  
 Told him she was as real as a beautiful dream,  
 A dream that made him wish to redeem  
 Life for an endless sleep, so that she  
 Could haunt his dream for eternity.  
 If he closed his eyes he could see her clear  
 As he saw her from down the stair.  
 What good were eyes if he couldn't see that face?  
 Why was not he deaf if he couldn't hear the voice  
 Of his angel? If he couldn't breathe the sandalwood scent  
 Of her body, then what was the use of his smelling sense?  
 If he had no power to hold her close,  
 What good would the hands do? And those  
 Feet were also useless as they failed  
 To follow the angel when she fled.  
 He wished he were dead, or at least  
 Out of the body that caused all this

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<sup>26</sup> A benevolent goddess.

<sup>27</sup> Govinda is another name for Krishna, the incarnation of the God Vishnu. Kamalini is another name for Radha-the incarnation of Laxmi, the goddess.

<sup>28</sup> A character in Hindu Mythology.

<sup>29</sup> Wife of Rama-the seventh incarnation of Vishnu. Sita was an incarnation of the goddess Laxmi. The Hindu mythological epic, *The Ramayana* deals with the story of Rama and Sita.

Pain. He wished to lose his grip over consciousness.  
 “Don’t be so hard on yourself,” Faizun says,  
 “Your body is but a slave of your soul.  
 Blame your heart, if you want to blame at all.”

*The Prince in Torment: (How Much Pain Can this Soul Endure?)*

O shameless life, why do you still  
 Breathe in this body? Why are you so cruel?  
 Leave this cage O, my tortured soul!  
 For I am the unhappiest man of all.  
 Leave, in search of a happy man;  
 Leave my dark dungeon.  
 I can bear no more, I beg of you;  
 Leave my body, I bid adieu.  
 Adieu, and have your abode  
 Within another who has love and hope.  
 Adieu! Seek him who is adored by his  
 Beloved, and lives in bliss.  
 Adieu! And do not mock me  
 For I am a slave of destiny.  
 I know I must suffer the pain  
 Of living a life that I disdain.  
 So, adieu life, stay no more.  
 For no more pain can I endure.

*The Wailing Prince Tried To Gain Self Control*

Where are you, my dearest,      the beating of my heart?  
     Why have you captured my soul?  
 Why did you come hence,      to kill me with a glance?  
     Heartless you are, my life’s jewel.  
 O, what have I done?      What is your reason  
     For being so unkind? Do teach me.  
     How to survive      when the breath of My life  
     Has left me in misery.  
 Why don’t you return,      to your love-struck man  
     And satisfy his desire?  
     O why can’t I yet      forget the face that  
     Can only ignite love’s fire?  
 Dear Lord, explain      for what reason  
     Do I burn in this fire of passion?  
 Where is she gone?      When will she return,  
     And reward me for my devotion?

Why, did she arrive in my life?  
 Why can't I forget her face?  
 "This is how you suffer for love. So  
 Learn to be patient," Faizun says.

*Attendants Brought the Prince Home*

Meanwhile, the attendants wanted to resume  
 Their travel. They looked for their Prince, whom  
 They found lying on the ground, as if dead.  
 Seeing him thus, they all decided  
 To take him home. They wrapped him tight  
 On his horse and galloped fast so they might  
 Reach home before death reached the prince.  
 The queen's courtiers looked askance,  
 "What was the cause?" None could explain  
 How it happened, or what was the reason.  
 All they knew was: the Prince went  
 Into a garden, and there he spent  
 Endless hours, where they eventually found  
 Their unconscious Prince on the ground.  
 They didn't even know the name  
 Of the king of that unknown realm.  
 The queen was not ready to bear the pain  
 Of losing another loved one again.  
 She still grieved the loss of her man.  
 How could she re-live that pain?  
 The courtiers decided not to disclose  
 This truth to her. They called for those  
 Who could cure him. Wise men came from all over  
 The world. But their confidence vanished in air  
 As they failed to bring the Prince  
 Back to his senses. If they had any means  
 To know how to heal a man  
 With a love-struck soul, only then  
 Could they heal him. The only son in his death bed,  
 How would the queen accept that?  
 How could she live without her hope?  
 Without her life? Without her love?  
 Exorcists, soothsayers, and all the healers,  
 Gave up; only the astrologers could decipher  
 What went wrong. They agreed on the fact that  
 It was time for the young man to find his mate.  
 The arrow of desire and sensual fire  
 Had struck him down. He'd now only admire

The touch of the maiden who numbed him thus.  
 The Queen's noblemen then realized that it was  
 Time to disclose the matter to their queen.  
 She flooded her eyes for having seen  
 Her own son lying as a living-dead.  
 She cried and screamed and lamented,  
 She fell on the ground, she ran towards her son.  
 She kissed his forehead and stroked his face. Everyone  
 Tried to comfort the grieving queen  
 "But none can soothe a mother's pain," comments Faizun.

*A Mother's Lament*

O, ruthless Lord of mine,      lamented the queen,  
     You punish me for what sin?  
 Almighty Lord,      It's a futile effort  
     For I've been dead ever since  
     You snatched      my loving husband.  
     His love was what kept me alive.  
 Oh, powerful Lord,      I died the moment  
     You stole the joys of a wife.  
 You know I was      never faithless  
     To you, or to my love.  
     Why are you      then trying to  
     Take away the only joy I have?  
     I am young,      and life's spring  
     Still resides in me.  
 But never have I thought      to deceive my Love,  
     Not even his memory.  
     Why do you then      try to torment  
     Me, by taking away my son?  
 Dear Lord of mine,      forgive my sins.  
     Spare the life of the one  
     Without whom      this mournful mother  
     Would have no reason to live.  
 Forgive my sins,      spare his life  
     O merciful Lord, forgive.

*A Mother's Plea to her Son*

Alas! My prince,      I cannot think  
     Of a reason good enough  
 That would make you      so adamant to  
     Sacrifice my love.

Friend I am neither, nor your mother.  
 Enemy I must be.  
 I now realize your hunting was  
 An excuse to torment me.  
 Tell me, who did this to you?  
 Why do you torture me thus?  
 Or is it something else? Genies, or giants?  
 Fairies? Or some evil-doers,  
 That are playing games to snatch away thus  
 A widow's only heir?  
 Have they made a pact with Death  
 So that you could die here?  
 God of death, you cannot take  
 Away my son, I say  
 O, cruel Yama,<sup>30</sup> I plead, let me be dead,  
 Before you take him away.  
 A lamenting mother thus kept shedding her tears.  
 "Since the arrow of desire wounded him thus,  
 He would only wake up when he found his love.  
 Then, let it be so," Faizun says.

*The Queen Sent for a Female Messenger*

The lamenting mother wanted to know  
 From where he was brought and how?  
 The courtiers informed her that  
 It was love-sickness, the *Brahmins* had said.  
 He went inside a beautiful garden.  
 Maybe there he had seen a woman  
 And fell, love-struck. Being advised by the queen  
 The courtiers sent for the wisest of women.  
 This woman would act as their envoy  
 She would then try to seek and deploy  
 Means to find out the secret  
 That turned the Prince into a living-dead.  
 The wisest of women approached them,  
 Stooping in age and self-esteem.  
 A cunning smile hung on her lips,  
 As she bowed before Her highness.  
 Wise she was, and her cunning nature  
 Even the gods couldn't conjecture.  
 She could twist both men and the world  
 With her conundrums of word.

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<sup>30</sup> God of death in Hindu mythology.

Her toothless smile she painted black.  
 Her white hair she adorned in a braid  
 Her drooping large breasts refused to remain  
 Covered. Dressed in white, this crooked woman  
 Could spend hours talking about others.  
 A gossip-monger, in short, she was.  
 In a sweet voice she asked the courtiers,  
 "How may I serve the Queen mother?"  
 The queen's men started to praise her  
 They called her their only savior.  
 They wanted her to use her cunning  
 To find out what happened during  
 The time the prince enjoyed the beauty  
 Of a garden, and what else did he see  
 That made him like this? "We'd be obliged,"  
 The noblemen said, "If you succeed  
 And unfold for us this mystery."  
 "Such a handsome youth, what else could it be  
 But the malady of a love-sore heart?"  
 She muttered within, "I can cure that."  
 She went to the prince and held his head.  
 In his ears she softly said,  
 "O, Prince wake up, for here is she  
 Who has caused this malady.  
 Wake up my Prince and look in here  
 Your beloved is standing near."  
 No sooner had she said all this  
 Than the prince opened his eyes.  
 "O, my love, where have you been?  
 O, my soul, what have I seen  
 That day near the lake? In that garden?  
 Were you a goddess, or a virgin maiden?"  
 Seeing an old woman sitting near  
 The Prince paused and then asked her,  
 "How can you cure my love-sick soul?"  
 "You'll find your love," Faizun tries to console.

*Regaining Consciousness,  
 the Prince Inquired About the Lady*

Waking up from      his deadly dream,  
    The prince saw the envoy.  
 "Please let me hear,"      He begged her,  
    "the truth about my life's joy?  
 Dear old lady,      listen to me.

I implore you to believe  
 Without my beloved, in this morbid world,  
 I can never live.  
 Who was her name? Why did she come?  
 And where did she disappear?  
 My imprudent heart is torn apart  
 My body now burns in fire.  
 She killed me thence with one glance  
 In that gorgeous garden.  
 She'd never discover that because of her  
 Suffers this love-sick man.  
 Dear wise lady, find her for me;  
 Please seek her out, and  
 Tell her that a loving heart  
 Is dying in a distant land.  
 Tell her for sure tell her true  
 How eagerly I wait  
 Bring her to me, Dear old lady,  
 Tell her she is my fate."  
 Hearing his lamenting speech  
 Faizunnesa just says,  
 "All those prayers of your pious mother  
 Will bring forth your happy days."

*Jalal's Description of the Mysterious Woman*

"To you old lady I have opened my heart;  
 I have told you how I fell apart,  
 Because of the woman I love.  
 What eyes she had! What a look she gave!  
 The moment our eyes met, I felt as  
 If I was hurt with five sharpened spears.  
 Her beauty bedazzled my mortal eyes  
 When I think of her, my heart aches.  
 I long for that cruel love, and cherish  
 The pain she caused. I can happily perish  
 From this earth, looking into those dark eyes.  
 I hope my words will make you realize  
 Why my heart, my every breath  
 Died, and still dies a thousand deaths.  
 Her long hair, braided, adorned in gold  
 Snapped like a snake. Thunders and lightning unfold  
 In her gait, her looks, and in her long hair.  
 O, what can I say, even her each ear,  
 To me seemed in gold was made.

Her beautiful face made the moonlight fade  
 I saw a lunar eclipse! I saw her lotus glance.  
 Her looks could make water lilies to forget their windy dance.  
 The sesame flower lost its charm in comparison to her nose,  
 Her pomegranate-teeth were perfect, and surrounding those  
     Teeth, were her lips, lips that defiantly made  
     Looking-glasses crack and break down in regret  
     As they would fail to reflect when  
     Those lips curved a smile. And then  
 Her sweet voice! O, dear lady, her soft words fell  
     On earth, and her voice could break the spell  
     Of death. Seeing her slender neck, fair swan  
 Would dive beneath the water. Her shapely arm, adorned  
 With slender fingers: her hands disgraced the lily's charm  
 And joyously bloom like flowers in each of her palms.  
     Each fingertip curved an arched moon, and  
     A white *champak* flower was each hand.  
 Like ripened fruit her bosoms were, and they surely made  
     A man pine for the love he could never get.  
     Her waist was thin, but stout like a lion.  
     Her navel, like a gold box, shone  
     At the center. A pair of banana trees were  
 Her trim legs; nothing could describe them more.  
     Her stunning buttocks, what can I say,  
     Would leave the strongest man in disarray  
 With desire. Mistaking her feet for fragrant flowers  
     Honey bees would fly around her."  
 "She was too beautiful to make men sad  
 And women ashamed for not having that  
 Beauty to charm their lovers or husbands,"  
     Faizunnesa makes this comment.

*In Search of the Maiden*

Hearing the Prince lament like that,  
 The wise old woman respectfully said:  
     "Your Highness, my future King,  
     I can assure you one thing—  
     That I will sacrifice my life,  
     To find this girl, your future wife.  
 I, Ramabati, will work from dawn to dusk  
     Until I accomplish this task.  
 For you, my Lord, I will reach the moon.  
     And I promise I will come back soon.  
 I'll bring the maiden with me, or at least

I will find out where she lives.  
 I have courage and the power to move,  
 The mighty gods; yours is only a game of love,  
 Which I can pay in a blink of an eye.  
 Tell me where you saw her, and I  
 Will find her. I'll tell her how much you care  
 I'll unite you two; so, have no fear."  
 The Prince then told Ramabati the name  
 Of the city where he saw that maiden.  
 He told her of the exquisite garden.  
 He bade her speed and a successful mission.  
 The wise envoy started for  
 A lovely city named Omar Nagar.  
 She'd find the garden where prince Jalal  
 Found his love and lost his soul.

*Rupbanu's Story*

Meanwhile, the mysterious lovely maiden who  
 Stole his heart, was also going through  
 The same torment. Since the day she saw  
 A stranger in her garden, she'd lost her glow.  
 Her gold complexion lost all its spark.  
 She had lost her wits; and in the dark,  
 She strolled in her garden for hours, alone.  
 Unhappy she was, and forlorn,  
 For she had lost all her dreams.  
 The mad woman's passionate screams  
 Filled the lonely sky with clouds,  
 Like an apparition she moved about.  
 She was not herself anymore;  
 Her coral lips had lost their color,  
 And the lotus face lacked its shimmer.  
 Her youthful body seemed to simmer  
 In the furnace of fervent desire.  
 She roamed sighing around the stair  
 From where she first saw him.  
 She lost her sleep, her hopes, and dreams,  
 She sobbed under the pale moonlight.  
 With vain hope she stayed all night  
 Where her beloved had stood that noon.  
 The woman's wailing darkened the moon.  
 She fell on the ground, and her long hair  
 Floated like clouds in the air.  
 The coldest wind or the water-fall  
 Could not soothe her suffering soul

While her heart burned in love-fire,  
 Her body was ablaze with desire.  
 Seeing her suffer in that condition,  
 Her attendants all sat in confusion.  
 "What should we do?" They said,  
 "How can we come to her aid?  
 She's taken over by love's desire  
 How can we even help her?"  
 They then asked her candidly  
 Who was the cause of her insanity.  
 They asked her why she declined  
 To eat or rest, and what was behind  
 All this? They all wanted to share  
 All her pain and despair.  
 The suffering maiden looked suddenly fierce  
 As she told her friends, "It appears  
 You were never my friends. If you really were,  
 You'd not have snatched me from there  
 And deprived me of the chance  
 Of having my very own romance  
 With this handsome stranger, who  
 Was sent by fate in the garden to  
 Make me the happiest of women.  
 How and why can I trust then  
 Those who have betrayed me  
 And become the very cause of my malady?  
 Leave me alone, in my own anguish.  
 You are not true friends. Leave me and perish  
 In the world, where traitors like you dwell.  
 Claim no more my alliance after pushing me to hell."  
 Frightened, the attendants ran to her foster mother  
 And explained what had happened to her daughter.  
 They told her they were driven away by Rup.  
 They knew not how a virgin maiden could stoop  
 To the mood aroused by sinful passion.  
 They asked the foster mother to find the reason.  
 The old maid rushed to see the desolate lass.  
 She found Rupbanu, lying on the grass.  
 She lay as if a skeleton there,  
 Buried in her own dark long hair.  
 Beauty and charm, she had no more.  
 Like a dried milk-pot she lay ashore.  
 She lay beside the deep and swelling lagoon,  
 Her life's breath hung between a sigh and a swoon.  
 The old nurse sat beside her and asked politely,  
 "My child! What's his name? Please reveal to me.  
 I've raised you with my own breast-milk, my dear,

Why this pain? Who caused this? Please let me hear.  
 My heart breaks apart to see my child wither thus.  
 You've no parent but only this old nurse.  
 Since I have nursed you and raised you with affection,  
 I'll understand the pain that caused this condition.  
 I will die, dear child, I will live no more,  
 If I fail to save you from the pain you endure.”  
 Saying thus, she wept with Rup. She kissed her cheeks and  
 Wiped her tears; she held Rup's face in her two old hands.  
 Moved by the sincerity and the love of her nurse,  
 Rup sang the following song as Srimoti Faizun notes.

*The Maiden Sang her Song of Sorrow*

The maiden sang her song of pain:  
 I think I will never gain  
 The strength to see tomorrow.  
 Dear mother, hear my song of sorrow.  
 Pain that kills my happiness,  
 Pain that snatches my peace,  
 My words, smiles, my life, and dream—  
 They will never be redeemed.  
 O, who'll know for whom I burn,  
 O, where do I go? Where can I run  
 With a soul falling apart?  
 O, who'll mend my broken heart?

*Rupbanu Narrated her Story*

Lamenting thus, the fair maiden told her nurse,  
 “How I have suffered! And I know the curse  
 That shadows my life. But, dear lady, I am not  
 Afraid to die. But the shame that I have brought  
 On me and my family is what I fear. I do not want  
 You all to be tortured by that ferocious giant.  
 So, be careful. Do not unfold this story of mine  
 To others. In secret I'll love and I'll pine  
 For the one who will never be my own.  
 Dear nurse, I will always mourn  
 The day I went to the garden. I wish now  
 I could undo what I did that day. But how  
 Can I forget the face that these eyes have seen?  
 I wish I had never gone to that ominous garden  
 To face the face of my eternal ordeal.  
 My faithful friends did the most cruel

Thing by taking me away from there.  
 I wish I could stay with him. My despair  
 Knows no bounds. O, dear mother, listen,  
 On that fated day I was walking in the garden.  
 And there I saw this handsome man;  
 He stole my heart and left me in distress.  
 I am like a doe that has been wounded by the arrow  
 Of a skilled hunter. Like a flower without fragrance, now  
 I live; like a snake without her fangs, or like a person  
 Robbed of wealth I feel. Like a beggar, or like a *Brahmin*  
 Without his scripture, I am now. When a hermit's meditation  
 Is interrupted, he acts crazy. He cannot pay attention  
 To the world around him. I am in the same state  
 My heart floats like an aimless boat  
 In the ocean of love." The nurse trembled in fear.  
 She knew the ferocious giant would not spare  
 A single life, if he came to know this.  
 Like a boa-constrictor, he would hiss  
 And squeeze from them every mortal breath;  
 He would cast a shadow of death.  
 Like the eclipse that absorbs all light,  
 He would absorb all. With a heart full of fright,  
 The nurse sat quiet. Rupbanu became restless more;  
 Her heart burnt. The way Radha<sup>31</sup> felt and suffered for  
 Her Krishna, she felt the same way. She lost her calmness  
 And her peace. Falling on earth, she cried restless.  
 Faizun only tries to narrate the tale  
 Of her suffering and loving soul.

*Rupbanu Lamented seeing her Nurse Depressed*

O, dear Lord      of the three worlds  
                          Lift me from this pain.  
 Joy I've never known.      Since I was born  
                          Only sorrow was my gain.  
 Begotten by a saint,      but raised by a giant  
                          I lived this life till now.  
 Never have I seen      among all men  
                          One who could take the vow  
 To rescue me, and      save the whole land  
                          From the hand of a ferocious fiend.

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<sup>31</sup> One of the most popular figures in Hindu mythology, Radha was the consort of Krishna, the ninth incarnation of Vishnu. Radha's devotion, pleasure and suffering for Krishna generated the Vaisnava tradition of devotional songs.

I will never have the fate to see my love  
 Until the giant sees its end.  
 I was fated to suffer, as I lost my mother  
 And the giant killed my father.  
 The giant was happy as he imprisoned me  
 To propagate through me his future.  
 I was born to destroy my father's joy,  
 For me he lost his life.  
 What a choice I'm given! To be a suffering woman  
 Or become a monster's wife!  
 And still my soul, my shameless soul  
 Lusts for life's delight.  
 Still my body tries to lure me  
 To undergo the fight.  
 My love tempts me, though my destiny  
 Is to suffer the pain of death.  
 So, die I will I am ready to kill  
 Myself. Before the last breath  
 Leaves me, I wish I could see  
 The face of the man I love  
 Listen to my words, dear Lord of the Lords;  
 Please send me some grace from above.  
 I'll give up my life for the love of my life  
 I only wish that he knew,  
 How I died and how I defied  
 Death for a love that was true.  
 If only he knew that my love was true,  
 That I loved him more than life—  
 Faizun says then, "Compose, chaste maiden  
 For the Lord vanishes all strife."

*The Foster-Mother Condemned Men and Tried to Console Rubbanu*

Thus Banu grieved over her mysterious lover  
 And the nurse suffered for the maiden;  
 She resolved to console the suffering soul  
 By speaking against all men.  
 She sat beside her; she embraced her  
 She kissed her forehead gently.  
 She burst into tears, she whispered in her ear:  
 "Dear daughter, listen to me carefully.  
 Weep not for man because he never can  
 Perceive why you mourn.  
 The Lord has replaced a man's heart  
 With a solid stone.

Believe not his words      because his sweet words  
     Are nothing but a magical weapon  
     That he uses      as a device  
     To capture a pretty woman.  
 The cunning man pretends      that he holds in his hands  
     The moon that he snatched for his lady.  
 He deceives with words,      and everything he does  
     He does to ruin her chastity.  
     He is like a bee      that sips honey  
     From flowers of various kinds.  
 A flower's dream,      or its love for him  
     He never keeps in mind.  
     Water never can      leave its mark on the sand;  
     To a man, a woman is like water.  
 His loving speeches,      his angelic face  
     Are but his shields that cover  
     His evil intent.      You'll understand  
     If you can reminisce how  
 Suffering and shame,      ruined Radha's name  
     And her love submerged in sorrow.  
     Reminisce the way,      Shyam<sup>32</sup> took away  
     Radha's name, reputation, and all.  
     After enjoying her,      the contented flute-player  
     Left her. And please recall  
 How Radha suffered      as Shyam disappeared  
     To seek another adventure.  
     Bear in mind,      a man is only kind  
     As long as it gives him pleasure.  
 Stop shedding tears,      my daughter, dear,  
     For the one who can only produce  
     Danger for you      and for us too  
     As the giant will kill us if he knows."  
 After hearing her words,      Faizun just adds  
     "Dear moon-faced maiden,  
 If you don't trust the nurse,      believe my words,  
     A man is never a friend."

*All Words Failed*

Whatever the nurse said, all words failed  
 The love-struck maiden moaned and wailed.  
 She kept on calling the mysterious lover.  
 She wished to see him before death took her.  
 Shame, confusion, or fear of the giant-

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<sup>32</sup> Another name for Krishna.

Nothing could stop the doleful lament  
 Of a mourning maiden for her mysterious lover.  
 And with her suffered her foster mother.  
 The two women thus sat together  
 And soaked mother earth with their tears.  
 Meanwhile, the female envoy reached the walls  
 Of the cursed garden where Rup saw Jalal.  
 Faizun now wants to tell you what happened,  
 As the Prince's envoy entered the garden.

## PART 2. MERCHANT OMAR AND KING ZAMZAM

### *The Envoy entered the Garden*

After traveling for days through the land,  
 The envoy reached the garden. And  
 The moment she stepped inside,  
 She was charmed and mesmerized  
 By the beauty and the fragrance  
 Of various blooms. She began to dance;  
 She became insane with sensual desire.  
 Though old age had withered her,  
 She felt aroused, like a young woman.  
 Spring breeze blew away her reason.  
 Sensual songs of birds she heard;  
 Her senses started to fall apart.  
 Her body went numb; her body ached.  
 She was bewildered. How was that  
 Possible for her to crave for the lust  
 She long forgot? She thought she must  
 Leave the place that had the power  
 To revive passion and desire  
 In her old bones. She left in haste  
 Away from there, and came to a place  
 Where a woman sat under a shade.  
 Ramabati befriended the innocent maid.  
 She asked the woman about the garden;  
 She wanted to know who owned the land.  
 The woman was a gardener there.  
 She told the envoy, it was Omar Nagar.  
 She also told Jalal's messenger  
 The tragic story of Merchant Omar.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Faizunnesa calls this character both a merchant and a hermit in her narration.

Omar's wealth and success,  
 Failed to bring him happiness.  
 He had not experienced yet  
 The joys that children can get  
 For their contented parents.  
 He prayed and waited with patience.  
 One day, the Merchant told his wife  
 He would lead a hermit's life,  
 He'd leave his wealth and fortune,  
 If God did not give him a son.  
 People told him, "You don't need to go out  
 In search of God. He can be sought  
 From your home. If you are sincere  
 Lord Almighty will hear your prayer."  
 Taking their advice, the Merchant prayed  
 For God's grace; for hours he meditated.  
 Sleepless he stayed and wept for hours,  
 He constantly asked God to grant his prayers.

*The Merchant's Prayer*

The Lord who is  
 without body and face,  
 The Almighty wise  
 For whom all rise  
 To whom all creations fall,  
 The creator and the destroyer of all.  
 The Lord who rules all things  
 I pray to you, the King of kings  
 You are the King of past and present,  
 And of future, and of the end.  
 You go beyond time and dream,  
 Yet you can stay within.  
 I only have a simple prayer  
 I only wish you can hear  
 The cries of this childless man.  
 I only ask for your blessing,  
 Which would come in the form of kin.  
 Son or a daughter, what do I care?  
 I only want one heir.  
 I only wish to be rid of the pain  
 Of being called "impotent."  
 Anger fumes in my heart  
 As people always hurt  
 Me by calling me behind my back

An infertile man, for my lack.  
 Listen to my prayer, Almighty, please,  
 Grant my suffering soul some peace.

*The Merchant Became a Father*

The merchant devoted his life to the Lord  
 He kept on praying and forgot  
 About his business and other worldly affairs.  
 One night, while he was saying his prayers,  
 He dozed off and experienced a vision;  
 In his dream an old man arrived,  
 “Go back to your beloved wife,” he said,  
 “I am here to tell you that  
 Tonight’s love will bring you the fruit  
 That you have been praying for.” The hermit then  
 Followed the advice that he had received in a vision.  
 He spent that night with his life’s partner;  
 He was not surprised when a few months later,  
 She bore signs of an expecting mother in her body.  
 The Merchant thanked God wholeheartedly.  
 Now no one would question his manly vigor;  
 He would soon be a father of a son or a daughter.  
 In due time, the expecting mother,  
 Gave birth to a beautiful daughter.  
 When the moon beam shines in water,  
 It makes everything glow and glitter.  
 When the sun touches the tips of mountains  
 The world reflects its bright radiance.  
 Such was the beauty of their new-born baby.  
 The proud parents were thankful and happy.  
 Merchant Omar shared his joy with everyone;  
 He arranged for a month long events of celebration.  
 The air smelled of dance and music and feast.  
 Conch and flutes and drums and trumpets,  
 Poured forth joys in people’s hearts.  
 Wise soothsayers then wanted to start  
 The ceremony to predict the girl’s future.  
 The learned astrologers agreed with each other  
 That she was a lucky one, and happiness awaited her.  
 Only one expressed some doubt, but was afraid to share  
 His thoughts. Merchant Omar assured him that  
 The learned man should not be afraid.  
 Being thus assured, the man sadly said,  
 “Your beautiful daughter is destined



As he lost his might, and he was defeated  
 By your devotee, Hanuman.  
 You listen in silence, you perceive without a glance  
 You respond to devotion.  
 Why can't you then see how you punish me?  
 Why don't you show some compassion?  
 You taught Satyavama that she was not Sita  
 No matter how beautiful she was  
 You gave Rukmini what she had deserved,  
 You always listen to prayers.  
 Your grace had touched a fatherless man's heart  
 And he fathered a tiny blessing,  
 Creator of my soul, now you are so cruel  
 Now you plan to destroy everything.  
 Why do you give then when all you intend  
 Is to make your devotees suffer?  
 I was happier before. I was unfamiliar  
 With the feelings of a father.  
 Neither I nor my wife care about our lives  
 But we care about our daughter.  
 Take our lives instead, O, mighty Lord,  
 And let our child prosper.  
 I did not complain even when  
 You gave me a daughter, not a son  
 Now that you did give me a child  
 Please spare the life of this one.  
 Faizun hears the Merchant's lament  
 And tells him to have faith  
 For Lord surely will save this child  
 From the grip of an untimely death.

*The Power of Destiny*

The Merchant and the happy mother  
 Took care of their precious daughter.  
 The tiny being contained in her  
 All the joy and all the laughter  
 That could make two people happy.  
 But who can avoid one's destiny?  
 In six months, the mother died.  
 The wretched Merchant mourned and sighed.  
 He knew the prophecy was coming true.  
 He knew his end was imminent too.  
 He knew he could not undo the fate  
 But he knew he should not regret,

For he has their child to rear;  
 His melancholy would disappear  
 If he was with his daughter.  
 He appointed a wet-nurse for her.  
 When she was seven, the Merchant thought  
 It was time to work. He had not sought  
 The worldly ways for years. But how long could a man  
 Sit idle? His trading boats were getting rotten;  
 His sailors just smoked away their lazy days,  
 His goods in storage were also in decay.  
 He knew his savings would not last long  
 If he did not resume the trade soon.  
 Besides, he was feeling ennui  
 Sitting at home. So, at last he  
 Called all his sailors. He called the crew  
 He called for all to start anew.  
 He asked them all to repair the boats,  
 To clean the masts and move all goods.  
 He asked them to bid farewell  
 To their wives. They would sail  
 For a long time since they were all  
 For seven years, sitting idle.  
 Sadly, all the sailors went home.  
 Their happiness on land was done.  
 They thought about their family.  
 Their children and wives would be unhappy  
 And they would be lonely as well.  
 They wished they did not have to sail.  
 When they went home, sad and depressed,  
 Their wives were worried. They asked,  
 Why they looked so pale? They wanted to know  
 If they had anything to do  
 With it; they cried and asked for forgiveness  
 For unknowingly destroying their marital peace.  
 The worried wives and the distressed men  
 Embraced each other. The husbands disclosed  
 The ominous news that they had brought  
 Home: they were cursed. Destiny's cruel hands  
 Had taken control over the merchant's  
 Ships. They were helpless! They had to obey  
 Their Fate's design and go away.  
 They had to obey their bread-giver's order,  
 And resume their lives as fairing sailors.  
 They would have to remain overseas for a while.  
 They were frustrated and felt miserable;  
 Thus lamented all sailors. Their wives were crying  
 They were not ready to bear this sudden pain of parting.

“Our hearts are broken!, Our bodies ache!” They cried.  
 “But we have to go,” the sailors said.  
 Meanwhile, the whole port was awake;  
 Shouts and screams seemed to shake  
 The shore. Masts were up, sails were ready  
 Various Goods were piled already.  
 Peanuts, pistachios, cashews and walnuts  
 Raisins, dried fruits, succulent dates,  
 Cosmetics, spices, and fragrant oils  
 Perfumes, clothes, and expensive jewels  
 Weapons, armor, and many other goods  
 Were all stored. And the merchant’s boats  
 Were ready to sail. Food and water were amply stored.  
 And after all the commotion subdued,  
 The sailors went home and bade farewell  
 To their mothers and fathers and kin and all.  
 Fathers were calm; but mothers of the departing sailors  
 Were taken over by grief. They were  
 Not ready to offer their sons to the ruthless seas.  
 The way a cow or a deer grieves  
 The loss of its calf, or its fawn, the sad women,  
 Grieved the same way, for their departing sons.  
 Good wives cried. The unfaithful ones frowned  
 They were making plans to enjoy time in their own  
 Way; they were upset to see their husbands coming home;  
 These women were greedy for their sinful freedom.  
 They were relieved when they realized  
 That the husbands came back only for a last kiss.  
 Merchant Omar’s Sailors then left the shore  
 Leaving their wives in Omar Nagar.  
 The pious and the loving wives wailed  
 While the oppressed ones thanked the Lord  
 For saving their lives from the hands  
 Of their tyrannous husbands.  
 While some wanted their men to come back home,  
 Some wished to hide away from them.  
 Some wished never to see them ashore,  
 Some moaned reminiscing their amorous hours.  
 Some others devoured their lust with other lovers  
 They were busy satiating their carnal hunger.  
 The wives were ashore while the mariners were aboard.  
 Merchant Omar’s heart was also troubled.  
 He felt sad and quite miserable;  
 Who would take care of his little girl?  
 His heart broke to leave his daughter.  
 He could not bear to see her suffer.  
 He then decided that Rupbanu and her maid

Should accompany them. So, all got on board  
And the ships set sail. Alas! No one remembered  
To ask God's grace before they started.

*The Voyage*

The merchant and his sailors left land.  
The roaring wind filled their sails, and  
Muscular men, with iron hands, added speed  
By rowing boats with endless spirit.  
They sang together as they rowed.  
The boats moved like layered clouds  
That float in the sky for endless hours.  
They sailed for days and months and more  
A beautiful new town. Omar and his men  
Were surprised to see such a beautiful town.  
"How can this be?" Omar asked himself,  
"I have traveled this route since I was twelve,  
Countless times I sailed through here. Now at age fifty  
I come here again, and what do I see?  
A brand new town, so gorgeously done!  
Maybe someone with a good fortune  
Invested his wealth to make it thus.  
Lower the masts! The town calls us!"  
He told his men. He was tempted  
To go into the town that so beautifully had  
Raised its head and captured his heart.  
The ships anchored. And in a small boat  
Merchant Omar went to explore  
The new town. Curious people came to inquire  
About him. He asked them about their own King,  
But no one would tell him anything  
For they were afraid, or had a suspicion  
About these strangers in their town.  
As he persisted, they spoke at last,  
They wanted to know about him first;  
So the merchant told them his name.  
He told them he was a renowned tradesman.  
The men then told him though their city  
Appeared happy, it had a sad history.

*Nurbanu and Fortas*

That land had long been under the power  
 Of a giant named Fortas. He and his followers  
 Destroyed the peace and beauty of that place.  
 Now, one King Zamzam lived in the west.  
 A mighty King he was, with two beautiful princesses;  
 The eldest one, Nurbanu, charmed all with her grace.  
 This Princess had an urge one night  
 To stroll in her garden under moonlit.  
 She woke all her attendants and asked them  
 To follow her to the royal garden.  
 No one knew, no one could ask  
 Princess Nurbanu what it was  
 That inflicted in her such a desire  
 To step outside in the dismal hour.  
 In the dark, where it so happened,  
 Fortas, the ferocious nocturnal giant,  
 Usually wandered. That night he was there  
 When the sleepless Princess and her friends were  
 Roaming fearless amidst the flowers,  
 The creature of the night watched them for hours.  
 At first he thought, by mistake the sun  
 Was up too soon; he thought it was the maiden dawn  
 That came down to enjoy nature's hoard.  
 Then the vile heart inside him roared.  
 He was love-struck; he hadn't seen for a long time  
 A woman so pretty! He gasped and groaned, yearning  
 For that woman. With eager heart he approached her.  
 The Princess and her friends stood still in fear.  
 Mistaking their fear as admiration,  
 The dim-witted giant quickly ran  
 Towards the Princess and grabbed her hand.  
 All her attendants fled, except for one.  
 As the giant took off with the Princess,  
 The maid gripped a corner of her lady's dress  
 And flew with them. The giant flew to a land unknown  
 Where females of his kind lived. All were glad to have found  
 Human food as they saw these women. But they all dreaded  
 Fortas's anger. With hungry palate the ogresses waited  
 For the departure of Fortas. The moment he saw them  
 Fortas knew what the ogresses planned. He then became  
 A furnace of anger. He fumed and yelled,  
 He threatened to kill if any one held  
 Any desire to harm these human-females.  
 The ogresses cowered; they started to tremble  
 Just like a snake that coils before peacock,

Or a snake that frightens the frog;  
 They felt the way a cat feels seeing a tiger,  
 Or the way a cat makes a mouse disappear;  
 The ogresses trembled in fear when  
 Fortas howled and yelled at them.  
 They asked for his forgiveness and  
 Promised to look after the fair maiden.  
 Leaving Nurbanu under their care  
 Fortas left. For days and nights he did not dare  
 Come before the Princess. He only wished  
 That the Princess would feel what he had felt  
 For her. He was amazed to be defeated  
 By a female mortal. He thought he was fated  
 To suffer at the hands of this pretty woman.  
 An unbreakable stone he had for his heart. Then  
 She crushed it easily, and tore him apart,  
 While she herself remained untouched!  
 Fortas waited for her to give up.  
 He told himself: "I will win her love.  
 How strong is a woman's heart!  
 How strange even is this game of fate?  
 The indestructible heart of a man  
 Becomes a toy in the hands of a woman!  
 Man possesses a tender heart;  
 It is woman's that is as solid as a rock.  
 Blood does not flow through her veins.  
 Her cruelty makes the venomous snakes  
 Lose their fangs. A man, like wax, melts  
 In her fire. She breaks and rebuilds  
 Him. He searches for this fiery stream  
 To quench his thirst; then she has power over him.  
 He dies for and without her fire,  
 She lets him suffer with desire.  
 Man is just a fish on a hook  
 She catches him with an alluring look,  
 Then keeps him as long as she pleases.  
 He thus suffers to give her peace.  
 The wretched man has no will  
 To escape. He craves for her until  
 She lets go. If a man is lucky, then  
 He'll find the virtuous woman,  
 Who will soothe his burning soul.  
 He'll stay in a burning hell  
 If he is fated to fall for a dame,  
 Who lacks both in virtue and in shame.  
 But good or bad, they are all alike  
 They are always trying to ignite

The fire of desire in all mankind  
So that they can play with a man's mind.”

*Faizun's Defense of Women*

Faizun says: why blame all women?  
Of course there are some who are to condemn.  
But the rest of women have solid rock hearts  
That man can never tear apart  
And give her a bad name and shame.  
A good woman does not play the game  
Of rousing desire in strange men.  
She loves and cherishes her husband.  
A good woman's stone-heart is her weapon  
Against all tricks played by men.  
It is man who tries to allure her;  
It is he who appears as a beggar  
Of love, only to become a plunderer.  
He makes her unchaste. And he leaves her.  
As he gets tired of being with one,  
He pursues another, and when he is done  
Corrupting her name, he lusts for another, and more.  
He can never settle with one woman, for  
He loves only her body, not her heart.  
A cunning man would do anything  
To enjoy a woman he finds charming.  
After consuming her innocent love, he'd forget  
About her and the promises he made.  
Maybe his wife awaits him in his home  
And here he is in his own pleasure dome  
Fulfilling his sensual hunger,  
Leaving his wife to wait and suffer.  
A man's love is never true;  
He speaks sweet, and that's only to  
Cover the poison he carries within.  
He comes to consume and inflict pain;  
He leaves a woman stained and forlorn.  
He ignites in her the fire of passion.  
He then leaves satisfied while she  
Lives in pain and misery.  
Faizun says, Lord, listen to this prayer  
Spare a woman from the trap of love and desire.  
Powerless she is, she is used by men.  
Do not blame her, gentlemen, for your own sins.

*Fortas tried to Court Nurbanu*

The giant, meanwhile, went mad with passion.  
 He ran to the lady to express his devotion.  
 He stooped his head, he spoke soft words,  
 He said, "Dear lady, please lift this curse,  
 And accept my love. I can not live without you  
 You've won me. Now own me too.  
 Make me a slave of your passion. You have  
 Burnt my body with the fire of love  
 Now heal my wounds. You reign like a queen  
 And see me suffer. As my queen, now gain  
 Control of me. How soft and pretty is your body,  
 And how cruel the heart! How you torment me!  
 I am ready to jump in the fire  
 Of your love and desire.  
 Give me love and help me live.  
 Save me please and I will not deceive.  
 I will love you forever and die for you.  
 Your refusal will kill me, and I'll kill you."  
 Nurbanu became furious as fire.  
 Seeing that, the giant tried to calm her.  
 He thought it wise not to make her unhappy,  
 He would rather wait. He'd see what destiny  
 Would bring him for his love and devotion  
 For a woman, who cruelly ignored his passion.

*Chaos in King Zamzam's Land*

Turmoil took over King Zamzam's land;  
 All were aghast to find their Princess gone.  
 The King's soldiers and the Queen's maids  
 Looked everywhere for the Princess.  
 The Furious King called in all maids  
 Who were supposed to be around the Princess.  
 He threatened to kill them all unless  
 They told him what they knew about the Princess.  
 The frightened maids then told the ruler,  
 How that night his daughter had a sudden desire  
 To enjoy the beauty of nature at night.  
 They told him about the giant's flight;  
 Grabbing the princess and her maid, the giant vanished in thin air.  
 They ran for their lives as the giant took her.  
 The insult and shame the King then felt  
 Made him scream. He wept and he yelled

At the missing daughter who brought such disgrace  
 To her father. He thought God wanted him to face  
 The fear and ugliness of life. Only God knew what  
     Might or had come. Man can only fret  
     And suffer. The Lord would put an end  
     To man's pride in a snap of a moment.  
     Thus cried Zamzam extolling God.  
 His sorrows subsumed. Then he thought  
     It was his duty as a king and a father  
 To punish evil, and to protect his daughter.  
     Protect he would, his daughter's name,  
     He would not allow her to suffer shame  
     And humiliation for her mischief.  
     What she did, he told himself,  
     Was beyond anyone's power to undo.  
     She would be saved and punished too.  
 A virgin princess ran away from the palace  
 With a stranger? Or her lover? She brought disgrace  
 By doing so. Thus she deserved to give up her life  
     So that her reputation would survive—  
     Not as unchaste—but as a virtuous maiden  
     The angry king made up his mind then.  
     King Zamzam decided to kill  
     Both his daughter and the devil,  
     Who had ruined his daughter's fate.  
     He was resolute as he bade  
     His soldiers to be ready to fight.  
 Trumpets and war drums were heard for nights.  
     Thousands of armored soldiers came  
     To fight to protect their king's good name.

### *The Battle*

King Zamzam rode his royal elephant  
     It looked so huge and so elegant  
 With its ivory tusks dazzling in the sun.  
 The embroidered umbrella tried to shun  
     The heat and light. The king's men,  
     Riding horses, camels, and elephants,  
 All marched together, thousands of them.  
     They rode for days and finally came  
     To the land of those cannibal beasts.  
 The commotion and war-drums' beat  
     Made Fortas curious, and he  
     Asked his soldiers to go and see

The source of all those noises.  
 The giants told him what it was:  
 Some defiant men had shown the courage  
 To come to fight. The news brought rage  
 Among the giants. Fortas knew it was no one else  
 But the father who had come to take revenge  
 For the abduction of his daughter.  
 Fortas burst out in laughter.  
 A puny man with a giant dream  
 Of killing a ferocious king  
 Approached this land! What could he do  
 If a man by his own choice had come to  
 Be devoured by hungry ogres?  
 He then asked all his monsters  
 To prepare for the battle. Summoned thus  
 Ogres of various shapes and ugly features  
 Gathered together behind their leader.  
 Their howling and yelling made even nature  
 Turn pale; Zamzam's men were also afraid  
 Yet as brave soldiers, they were ready to fight  
 The monsters who had weapons, might, and magic spells.  
 Thousands died while many others fell  
 To the ground, wounded. Seeing his men  
 Falling thus, Zamzam took up his weapon  
 To kill those ugly vile giants. But  
 It did not take him long to realize that  
 Mortal men with their tiny weapons  
 Could never destroy all these demons.  
 Suddenly he remembered a spell he learned  
 From a magician. With that spell he could turn  
 His arrows into venomous snakes.  
 Soon the battleground was filled with snakes  
 Pythons, cobras, and many other kinds  
 Hissed and rattled, and bit the giants.  
 The magical power of giants failed  
 To break King Zamzam's venomous spell.  
 The leader demon fled the scene  
 He left his land and was not seen  
 Around, for many years. King Zamzam  
 Was angry for he failed his chance  
 Of killing the killer of his name.  
 However, Zamzam felt content.  
 He knew next time the vile monster  
 Would think before stealing a daughter  
 Of another father. Retribution made him soft;  
 King Zamzam then paid his tribute to God.

*King Zamzam Praised the Lord*

Merciful Lord      praise be to God  
                     The ocean of abundance,  
 Not to be seen      He is within  
                     All of our conscience.  
 Does and undoes      whatever He wants  
                     No one dare looks askance.  
 He has the power      to solve all our  
                     Sufferings and problems.  
 He gives the frail      the strength to kill  
                     The mightiest of all.  
 He can make a king      rise and shine  
                     He can make an Emperor fall.  
 My strength then      to fight these demons  
                     Declares His power.  
                     He's all in all,      He's in control  
                     He stands with none to compare.  
 He seems unkind      when we fail to find  
                     The reasons of His cruelty.  
 He is not to blame,      we should condemn  
                     Our cruel Destiny.  
                     Faizun says,      "All must praise  
                     The Lord, and have patience,  
 For the Lord Almighty      always shows pity  
                     He is the ocean of abundance."

*King Zamzam Killed his Daughter*

While King Zamzam was thus praising his Creator, the ogresses heard about the grand battle and the defeat. They became scared and left the palace in search of their defeated King. King Zamzam finished his prayers. He remembered his abducted daughter. He remembered the promise he made. With a heart full of vengeance, he ran towards Fortas's palace in search of his daughter.

Blinded with rage	the King ravaged
The demon's palace.	With a wrathful heart
He looked everywhere	for his daughter,
And every corner	of the fort he searched.
When the maid	who accompanied
The Princess,	saw his angry face,
She was trembling.	In fear. She was crying
For his mercy.	but he was merciless.
Zamzam killed her.	When his daughter

<p>Came running Thinking that her Had come there Who could think Had the heart Life's pleasure By killing her From the dungeon Or so he thought And killed To redeem The blind king He became guilty Shouldn't have King and a father He then became. Of a father, who Would never fade. And it was the father To punish his foe He destroyed his An innocent child For Bivishan<sup>39</sup> Were able to kill Was saved from fire To spare his life He who prays God's other names are: Quddus and Karim His name is Sattar. Chant all His names<sup>43</sup> And you will never see Danger. Faizun says, A wise man's presence, Shines to reveal for us</p>	<p>towards the King, mighty father to rescue her. that a King to tear apart from his own daughter? he rescued her of sinful passion, when he sought his own child. his daughter's sins, committed this crime. of a crime that he committed. A brave he was; murderer The agony and shame killed to rescue, The daughter was dead, who committed the murder. what did he do? fame and peace. he thus killed. Sri Rama and Laxman<sup>40</sup> Ravana. Ibrahim Khalil<sup>41</sup> as it was the Lord's desire and let him survive. receives God's grace Jalal<sup>42</sup> and Jabbar Gafur and Rahim His name is Gaph-faar. all the time the face of ugly "Always follow the wise. like soft moonbeams, the path of good and peace.</p>
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<sup>39</sup> Ravana's brother, who helped Rama to enter Ravana's palace.

<sup>40</sup> Rama's younger brother whom Rama asked to look after Sita's safety in his absence. See Brian Thompson, *The Story of Prince Rama*, (New York: Viking Books, 1988).

<sup>41</sup> The prophet Abraham.

<sup>42</sup> In Islam, God's power and grace are explained through ninety-nine names. *Jalal*, *Jabbar*, *Quddus*, *Karim*, *Gafur*, *Rahim*, *Sattar*, and *Gaph-faar* are some of them. The meaning of each name is as follows respectively, respected, powerful, sacred, kind, forgiving, caring, keeper of secrets, and forgiver. See Qazi, *Book of Muslim Names*, 23–29.

<sup>43</sup> It is an Islamic custom to chant God's ninety nine names. A string of ninety-nine beads is used to keep the count.

His virtue eclipses	evil and vice,
His wise words can	help us to salvation.
Wisdom can	control an evil mind;
With wisdom	comes compassion.”

*The Evil Plan*

The King thus killed his first born,  
 Blinded with rage, he did not mourn;  
 Instead, he made an evil plan  
 To keep his name free from the stain  
 Of scandals and infamy. It came then  
 To his evil mind, scandal might again  
 Occur through the works of another.  
 Hurbanu, his other daughter,  
 He left at home, with her mother.  
 He thought, she also should suffer  
 Before pouring sufferings on him.  
 Hurbanu was the prettiest of women;  
 Even the sun would set in shame  
 When Hurbanu came out to brighten  
 The world with her beauty. Her braided hair  
 Hung like a snake, hissing behind her.  
 Man might endure the venomous bite  
 Of ferocious snakes, but he might  
 Not survive after seeing this snake of a braid  
 That hung and allured him to forfeit  
 His world for her feet; and if by chance,  
 The pretty woman looked up, the face  
 Of the moon would darken in pain.  
 Stars would envy her eyes when  
 She threw her lustrous looks at them.  
 The rainbow would think it a shame  
 To have lost its arch on her brows.  
 Pearls were her tears, and her nose  
 Was like the beak of the prettiest bird. Pearls were  
 Her teeth; her lips were new sprouting leaves. The color  
 That she put on her lips sparkled; and the chant  
 Of her voice hushed the cuckoo with embarrassment.  
 Her neck stood as if to censure  
 The pea-hens, for not being so slender.  
 The stem of water lilies shrank  
 Seeing the beauty of her hands.  
 Her slender fingers touched a rose  
 And the shameful rose grew a thousand thorns.

Her breasts shone, as if made with gold,  
 Firm and bright, they adorned her.  
 Trees shed fruit as they could not bear  
 To see her breasts, untarnished thus.  
 Over each breast, the dark nipples  
 Reminded one of the bees  
 That flew around flowers to consume nectar.  
 It was impossible for a man to resist her.  
 Her waist and her navel could allure any man  
 Towards the ocean of sensation.  
 Wise people must not read these lines  
 As a proof of evil or carnal sins.  
 Wise men must forgive Faizun, as she  
 Describes here a woman's physical beauty.

*The King went to Execute his Evil Plan*

After killing his first born  
 The cruel king did not mourn;  
 Instead, he made an evil design  
 He did not want any one to stain  
 His name. To save his reputation, he would dare  
 Destroy the lives of his younger daughter  
 And the mother, who bore in her womb  
 The impure daughters who brought the doom  
 Upon him. It takes an evil woman  
 To bring up such evil children.  
 Kill he must the evil breeder  
 He must not spare the life of the other  
 Daughter, who still was chaste  
 By mere chance. With great haste  
 The king reached his kingdom safely,  
 His heart heaved with fury.  
 The lovely queen came to receive her king,  
 But he did not respond to her greetings;  
 Instead, he began to reproach her  
 For being the cause of his despair.  
 He said, "You are devil incarnate.  
 What a clever plan you made  
 To destroy my name! You bore  
 In your womb, some whore  
 Like you. Together you tried to ruin  
 My name." "Blame me not," said the queen.  
 "I was but a container of your seed.  
 I never had the power to decide

About what and when you sowed  
 If the seeds were good, I'd bear the fruit  
 Untarnished and pure. If I bore in my womb  
 Children who brought in your doom  
 They are your own—cause and resource  
 How can you pour down your curse  
 On me for your own deed, and destiny?  
 How can I be a fallen woman  
 When you are the one and only man  
 Who could enjoy and destroy me?  
 Do not put me through this agony.  
 Blame yourself; you might have rotten seeds  
 To plant in me. But then many of our deeds  
 Are beyond us. How Ravana could be born,  
 To Viswasraba,<sup>44</sup> the gentlest of men?  
 The mother, Nikasha,<sup>45</sup> also bore another son:  
 Ravana's brother was Bivishan!<sup>46</sup>  
 The wise Prahlada<sup>47</sup> was begotten by an evil father.  
 The hermit Baesh<sup>48</sup> had Motshogondah<sup>49</sup> as his mother!  
 Even the prophet Noah fathered a son; a wicked son was he  
 Prophet Ibrahim had a wicked father. Mohammed had the destiny  
 To become a prophet, but his uncle was a sinful man.  
 All is what Lord perceives, we are not meant to understand."  
 The queen's words appeased the king. He forgave her  
 But he went inside to kill his other daughter.

*King Zamzam Rebuked Hurbanu*

"You are all alike, debased woman,  
 You cannot be better than the other one.  
 I killed her, and now I'll stop you  
 From ruining me. Though it is true  
 That I'll have no one to carry my name  
 But I'd prefer that to the enormous shame

<sup>44</sup> Ravana's father; he was a righteous King.

<sup>45</sup> Ravana's mother, who was respected for her virtue.

<sup>46</sup> Bivishan was considered a traitor by Ravana as he helped Rama enter Ravana's palace.

<sup>47</sup> Son of the Emperor of the demons of underworld. Prahlada worshipped the God Vishnu who killed the demon Emperor and put Prahlada on the throne.

<sup>48</sup> The famous sage in Hindu mythology who was born to an ascetic and a fisherwoman.

<sup>49</sup> The literal meaning of the name is "smells like fish." The word *motsho* means fish, and *gondha* is an adjective of the word *gondho*, which means smell. Baesh's mother was a fisherwoman, and thus had the name that means "a woman who smells like fish."

That my daughters will bring.”  
 The frightened daughter was trembling  
 In fear, as the king approached her  
 With these words. She burst into tears.  
 She wept and trembled and said not another word  
 The father looked at her and stopped  
 For a while. He felt in his angry heart  
 A sudden twist of pity and love. What  
 Could he do if she brought with her  
 This fate of destroying herself and others?  
 Seeing him softened, Hurbanu gained  
 Some courage; she decided to speak and stand  
 For her own defense. “Dear father,” she pleaded,  
 “Now that Mother’s eldest daughter is dead,  
 She only has me. Don’t deprive her of that  
 Think of Mother who will have no child left;  
 Think of my sister whom you have killed  
 for a crime she did not commit;  
 And think of your people; they who would blame the king  
 For shedding blood of his own offspring.  
 So, think, dear father, before you now act.  
 Don’t punish me for a sin I haven’t committed.  
 Nurbanu died for another’s crime. She never  
 Defied you. But that did not stop you from killing her.  
 You should kill me too, dear father,  
 If you think, as my life-giver,  
 You own the power to be the savior  
 Of my soul. I wouldn’t regret that I,  
 So young and innocent, have to die  
 With a shame that is not even my own.  
 But a king like you, who is always known  
 For wisdom and judgment, should not be blind  
 With so much rage to commit the crime  
 For which a father is eternally damned.  
 Bring your emotion in reason’s command.  
 And don’t destroy your spiritual peace  
 By committing the same crime twice.”

*The Transformation*

A change took place	in his raging heart
As the listened	to Hurbanu’s words.
His anger melted	and softness unveiled
Like a morning sun;	his heart gave in
To a ripple of affection.	He felt the passion

And the guilt that	he should have felt
When he went to murder	his older daughter.
He came to his senses;	he felt remorse.
Sad and distressed,	he wept for hours
For the child he'd killed,	and for the rage he felt.
He knew in his mind,	it was Fortas the giant
He should have killed; so,	He then took a vow
To avenge the murder	of his daughter.
King Zamzam called for	his royal advisors.
He told them	they had a new war
With the ferocious	Fortas and his clan.
With his wife	and daughter then,
He made a plan	to move to the land
He retrieved	from the vile giant.
He would wait there	for his chance
To avenge the death	of his daughter; hence
He gave his crown	to his brother, and went
To make a peaceful home	in a hostile land.
His men followed him,	and worked hard
To make that land	their home. They had
Still been waiting	to kill the ogre
When Merchant	Omar arrived there.

### PART 3. THE ORDEAL OF RUPBANU

#### *The Abduction of Rupbanu*

Merchant Omar, after hearing the sad tale of Zamzam,  
 Resolved to meet him to offer his hand as a friend.  
 As he was about to leave his ship, it then came to his mind,  
 His daughter Rupbanu would be in danger; the giant might find  
 Her easily, if she stayed in the ship with others. He thought  
 Rupbanu would be safe in deep woods. So his men brought  
 Their ship near hills, beside a dark deep forest.  
 He left to see the king of the land, while the rest  
 Of his people relaxed amidst the beautiful nature's green.  
 Rupbanu was also enjoying the warmth of the sun.  
 It was just her fate that the mother-ogress  
 Happened to be hiding in that lonesome place.  
 She thought this pretty female would be a perfect mate  
 For her ogre-son, and she fled to inform him that.  
 Fortas came back with his mother to see what she had seen  
 He saw Rup. He went blind, as if he had been  
 Struck by a lightning or by the sun itself.  
 The wrinkled female went to the ship. With her help

The giant defeated all men, and captured all the women.  
 Merchant Omar came back to see the ruin. And then  
 He fought the giant to free his child. He however failed.  
 The giant killed him. His wretched daughter wailed  
 At the loss of a father and the loss of happiness  
 From now on, she only sings songs of distress.

*A Damsel in Distress*

The damsel in distress sang  
 To God her mourning song:  
 "You are so cruel, God,  
 You can kill with such a soft  
 Touch, and in such a way  
 You can put into dismay,  
 The lives of the innocents.  
 You kill the righteous kings;  
 You make the evil doer  
 Succeed and enjoy power.  
 You turn the rich into beggars.  
 In a cruel way you show your power.  
 You make the poor the wealthiest of all  
 You make the pious men fall.  
 With your command, sinners then  
 Behave like virtuous men."

*The Maiden's Lament*

Wailing thus the lonely princess  
 Expressed her grief for the merchant.  
 Trembling in fear she shed her tears  
 For the loving father. "Leaving me in the hand  
 Of unknown fear, Oh, father dear,  
 You have gone to seek peace in heaven.  
 God, show mercy. Take pity on me.  
 Take me away from this world then.  
 Powerless I am, save me from shame  
 Take me away from all this! Dear Lord,  
 I have no intent to survive when  
 My father has gone away from this world."

*Fortas in Love again*

Fortas the giant, the ferocious creature  
 Was again in love. He wanted to possess her  
 As his mate. So he went to the nurse who attended her.  
 He asked her to make Rupbanu not fear  
 Him. He knew the nurse would succeed,  
 And Rupbanu would surely hear the pleas  
 Of this old woman who took care of her.  
 The woman pondered. She was very clever.  
 To save herself and her foster-daughter  
 She told the giant that he should not interfere  
 With a mourning daughter. In fact, she said that  
 Instead of hurrying, Fortas should wait  
 Because Rupbanu was not a woman yet.  
 He should protect her, and he should wait  
 Until she grew, like a ripened fruit  
 With a grown woman, he definitely would  
 Have more enjoyment. The giant resolved;  
 He decided to do what he was told.  
 He would wait until this pretty  
 Doll turned into a sensual beauty.  
 Rupbanu and her people lived since then  
 Under the care of Fortas, the giant.  
 All this tale of sufferings and pains  
 Were told to the envoy by that woman in the garden.  
 The envoy came from the land named Shimal,  
 As she had promised to Prince Jalal,  
 To search for her who took his heart, when  
 He was visiting her beautiful garden.  
 Now, after listening to the whole story,  
 The envoy knew about the mystery  
 Of the woman that Prince Jalal saw.  
 She asked the gardener to help her now  
 To get the two loving souls together.  
 The gardener agreed and said to her:  
 "There was a time when life with all  
 Its pleasures and charms would happily dwell  
 In this body; the body now sadly sags  
 With the memories of my bygone days.  
 True it is. My days are gone;  
 But in my mind I am still young.  
 This wrinkled body still stirs with desire  
 For a muscular man, for a passionate lover.  
 So, here I spend my lonely hours.  
 Hungry for love. My husband, like many others  
 Has fled to be safe from Fortas, the giant."

"Help me then," said Jalal's messenger,  
 "Let my prince see his mysterious lover.  
 Experienced as you are, you must know  
 What lovers feel when they are apart. Tell me how  
 This wretched prince can come to see  
 The cause of all his misery."  
 To this plea, the old woman said,  
 "Amidst this garden I live in a hut.  
 Go, bring your Prince and I will arrange  
 A meeting between my Lady and your Prince."

*The Love-struck Prince*

Since the envoy left in search of his lover,  
 Jalal did nothing but wait for the messenger  
 To come back with some good news for him.  
 He ignored his men and rebuked them  
 If they tried to reason with him. The wretched man  
 Lived, as if in dream, in sleep, or in between.  
 He dreamed of his love, and when he was awake  
 He thought only of her and did not partake  
 In any work, in leisure, or in anything at all.  
 He slept and dreamt, woke, and suffered with an anguished soul.  
 This is how love plays its game. This is how it rules  
 It makes one part with wit and reason. It ridicules  
 The wisest and the richest alike. Man is but  
 A slave of love and love controls this world.  
 Virtue and vice spring from love as it directs our minds  
 To seek, destroy, rage or build, to hide or to find  
 The cause or the source of this eternal flow of passion.  
 Some love God and dedicate their lives to spiritual reasons;  
 Some love to build family, while some love material gains  
 Some love evil and thus they follow the path of sins.  
 Love is indeed a riddle that none can ever resolve  
 The love-struck prince is making futile efforts to solve  
 His love-riddle. "Calm down, Prince," says Faizun,  
 "The messenger comes. Your riddle will be solved soon."

*The Envoy and the Prince*

The envoy traveled fast to reach home.  
 Her trek was long and wearisome  
 To see the prince she went at night.  
 Pretending to check if he was all right,

The cunning lady went near the bed,  
 Where the prince was lying as if dead.  
 Her hands touched him and her lips whispered,  
 "Wake up, dear Prince, your time has occurred.  
 Bid sorrow adieu for you will, from now on,  
 Bask in the warmth of pleasure, sitting in the throne  
 Of your happiness." The prince woke up and asked,  
 "Tell me, my envoy, where is my beloved?  
 Save me from torment, tell me what you know."  
 "Hush, have patience, I will tell you all now."  
 Hearing all, the prince decided that he would  
 Start for his journey. The envoy said that he should  
 Inform the queen of his intention.  
 The queen-mother then should take decision.  
 She might ask the best of men to accompany  
 The prince in his difficult journey.  
 But Prince Jalal did not want it to be as such.  
 He believed that it wouldn't help much.  
 "I want to go alone," he said, "this is my ordeal;  
 I will succeed if fate permits. Others can't feel  
 Or know the pains of my heart. So they wouldn't care  
 They would leave me if confronted by danger.  
 Or, they would try to bring me back. This is what  
 Frightens me most. If hope is not found at  
 A moment of distress, it is hard to live.  
 The vines of hope help this *sansar* thrive  
 Without hope, this world would be well lost.  
 Wives, offspring, wealth and other things cherished most  
 All grow from the loving root of hope.  
 When dejection cuts the root of that love  
 Death hastens. One's pain, lady, another doesn't endure  
 Let us depart. My heart doesn't want to delay any more."  
 Saying thus, he brought two horses from the stable.  
 "Can you ride?" he asked her. "Of course. I am able  
 To do any work," the envoy said. The two rode their horses.  
 Riding ahead, the woman showed the way to the prince.  
 Losing her hope over her life, she proceeded  
 Towards the place where Shama, the gardening woman lived.  
 Here she was afraid of the wrath of the queen,  
 And there the ferocious monster was waiting!  
 Soon they reached Shama's dwelling.  
 Shama appeared and prostrated before the prince.  
 The prince blessed her, and Shama offered him a seat  
 "Now dear Prince, drown in Banu's love," Faizun said.

*The Florist Inquired*

With joined hands	prayed the old woman:
O virtuous prince,	reveal please
Your desire.	Why are you here?
What is the reason?	Who claims your passion?
"Who owns you	owns me too,"
Replied the prince,	"That's what brings
Me in here. You	can save me. Please do.
Take me to her, please,	and let me have a glimpse.
You serve the lady	and she possesses me!
She has wrapped	her rope of passion
Around my body.	If her face I can't see
My soul will leave soon-	this bodily prison.
Take me, I urge,	to your mistress.
I've come to see her.	This is my reason.
Go, tell her when	in the garden
She saw him first	she killed him then.
Tell her he came	to be her servant.
The way flowers	offer honey
To moths and bees,	in the same way
She could make	the lover happy.
Tell her to save	the wretched man
By giving him	her love and affection.
She must show compassion	for this suffering man.
I would drink poison	as a love-potion
Only to please this lady.	Her cruelty would kill me!
Yes, I would die for her;	then she would be my killer."
Shama, the gardener woman	tried to calm him down:
"What kind of	a Prince are you?
A future sovereign	how can you be, when
When you don't display	any respect for a lady?
O the protector of laws,	Your desire will bring forth
For the distressed maiden,	humiliation and shame.
An honest man's daughter	how can she come near
A Prince and a future ruler?	The virgin lives under
The power of a demon.	How can I even
Try to do as you fancy?	The giant will kill us surely.
If you are a king's son,	then behave like one.
Follow my advice, and	Go back to your palace."
The gardener's speech	unsettled the Prince.
His body trembled;	unconscious, he fell.
The gardener felt sad.	She came to his aid
She fanned him and	sprinkled rose essence
And sandalwood scent	to bring him back to his senses
Then his thoughts	and worries returned.
He sighed in grief;	he did not want to live.

The one who gave            him back the sighs of love,  
 The sufferings of pains      sorrows and separation,  
 Is none other than        this writer—Faizun.

*The Gardener's Words*

After regaining his senses the prince fell down  
 To the florist's feet and begged her for one  
 Chance to see his beloved. The perplexed lady thought:  
 "What a hoard of danger destiny has brought  
 On me! How can I arrange for this man to meet  
 A woman who is guarded by a giant?" She decided  
 To talk him out of his dangerous plan:  
 "Dear Prince, you are ignorant of the nature of a woman.  
 A woman corrupted the life of Adam  
 Then all his sons became her victims.  
 Woman destroyed Imam Hossain<sup>50</sup>  
 Woman destroyed Lanka's Ravan.<sup>51</sup>  
 Woman destroyed the king Duryadhan.<sup>52</sup>  
 Woman destroyed his whole clan.  
 Woman corrupted hermits and saints.  
 Woman destroyed countless merchants.  
 Woman destroyed many brave heroes.  
 Woman destroyed the riches of Kubera.<sup>53</sup>  
 Woman even destroyed gods.  
 Why do you want to give woman a cause  
 To worry you? Don't you remember  
 Stories you heard about her disastrous nature?  
 Wise men write about a woman's vice  
 But who am I to tell you? You are wise."  
 "It is beyond my grasp to judge a woman  
 But this I know, that all are not the same.  
 When one woman commits a crime  
 For that the womankind shares the blame.  
 Only Lord can discern the vice and virtue.  
 Besides Him, no one knows who  
 Or what a woman is. Why should you then  
 Give your life for a woman?"  
 Trying hard to coax him with such a  
 Sweet chain of words, then speaks Faizunnesa.

<sup>50</sup> Prophet Mohammad's grandson.

<sup>51</sup> Ravana.

<sup>52</sup> A king in *Mahabharata*; father of Arjuna.

<sup>53</sup> A character in the *Mahabharata*.

*Prince Jalal spoke Stern Words*

The more Shama tried to calm the intrigued  
 Prince, he was more irritated.  
 "Listen to me," he said, "A woman has and always had  
 All the virtues. She can never be slighted.  
 It is love, not hatred that makes her great  
 And makes a man desire to be loved.  
 Since you have failed to have fulfillment, you hate  
 Your own race. You should regret  
 For you have never had a chance to love. Your hatred  
 Of women is but an expression of that  
 Lacking. I also had a false hope that  
 With your help I'll meet Rup, my beloved.  
 My cunningly aged messenger had  
 Brought me here so that you can help; instead  
 Of helping, you reprimand me?" His anger frightened  
 The two women. They had never thought his heart  
 Was so strong; they decided to let him see her. Shama said:  
 "Forgive us, the future head of a kingdom. I just said  
 What I thought was best. But if you thus insist  
 I will try so that what you dream, you can get."  
 "Go do your best, go, make haste  
 Let the lovers meet," Faizun pleads.

*The Gardener's Request*

Shama, the florist still sat with joined hands  
 She still tried to calm him down.  
 She still said: "The woman you seek  
 Is not your match. It is not wise to forsake  
 Life for a woman below your rank. It is true  
 The Almighty has not given only you  
 This punishment of bereavement.  
 Such yearnings and pain of separation  
 Rule a lover's mind; you are no exception  
 Just because you are a king's son  
 And a future ruler. Soon you will be  
 A King. Save your mother from the misery  
 And pain of loss by saving her only son.  
 King you are, and I, a poor woman,  
 Am telling you to reason with your mind.  
 I spoke cruel words only to be kind,  
 For I am concerned for your well being.  
 But do what you please, I'll say nothing."

The Prince took her hand and placed  
 It over his head; and then he just said:  
 "Save my life and lead me to my ocean  
 First I will quench my thirst; then I'll drown."  
 Shama slowly told him the tale  
 Of Rupbanu's life. She told him in detail  
 How the hermit was granted his wish to  
 Have a child; how beautiful Rupbanu  
 Was born; and how the astrologers foretold  
 Her fate; how, when she was six months old,  
 Her mother died; how she was brought up by a nurse;  
 How she sailed with her father, at a tender age;  
 How the merchant sailed to do his trade;  
 How he came ashore a new city; how he left  
 His daughter and some men near a hilly shore  
 To greet the king of that land; how the ogre  
 Found and captured her; how the giant killed  
 Her father, and how the giant, with his heart filled  
 With love for her, asked the nurse to reason  
 With Rupbanu; how the monster then  
 Agreed to wait for her when  
 The nurse told him that Banu would marry  
 Him, when she was old enough to be  
 His wife. Shama also told the Prince,  
 Since then they had been living there, waiting  
 For Banu to grow up, and marry the demon.  
 The city was nothing but a well-guarded prison.  
 She told him she had no heart to bring  
 His beloved to him, but she could do one thing:  
 She could convey to her the sufferer's words.  
 Hope stirred life in his dying heart.  
 "Help me then; take my letter to my beloved,  
 Save my life," The prince again said.  
 He composed his letter then.  
 Faizun says, "Write as best as you can."

#### PART 4. THE CORRESPONDENCE AND COURTING

##### *Jalal's Letter to Rupbanu*

Heading:

To

The love of my life, my heart's idol, my hypnotizer, redeemer of danger, sojourner of sorrows, lavishly mirthful lover, enchantress of

the world, my amusing darling, nectar-lipped, sweet-voiced, dearest  
Srimoti Rupbati,

The pretty face that I beheld in the bower  
Had ignited in my heart a bon-fire.

Seeing the beauty I became insane.

My heart breaks and my words fail my pen  
All day long, my honey-bee-heart ponders  
And wants to sink into your heart of lotus.

I will give up life for you, and you will  
Suffer in three worlds for the scandal.

Even after death you will find no peace  
If with love you do not respond to this

Letter. As a slave, I offer this plea at your feet,  
From the touch of your feet, a poor soul would see light.

Postscript:

As a postscript I describe this

Hear my words, dear maiden

Your love-arrow struck my heart, and now

I am like a serpent without its fang

Lotus-faced lady, dark-eyed beauty,

You're my Radha, with elephant-gait.

My venomous destiny, when you stung me

You turn into ashes what was once my heart.

Now be my healing lady, and prescribe a remedy

Save me from the venom of this serpentine desire

You are my wind, my breeze of spring

You are my heavenly healer.

Hear my story from your florist,

Save my soul, I implore.

I know this for certain, you will not reject this man

I know you will accept his passionate letter.

Signed,

The ever-thirsty lover, seeking the soothing water of your love;  
your love-swallow; a humble letter from Sri Jalal, the beggar,  
the love-slave with a voracious longing for your sensual beauty.

*Prince Jalal gave his Letter to Shama*

Thus the prince poured out his heart

In the letter. Giving it to the florist

He asked her to tell the maiden:

“I present myself to her as a servant

Of her love; forever I want to remain thus

A slave, under those feet; forever hers.

Prisoner in the kingdom of yearning I am

And my heart burns forever in her love flame.  
 How much pain I can endure, I can't perceive  
 I clutch to life with the hope to receive  
 Her love. Dear florist, please go, tell her all these  
 Now you hold the power to end my miseries.  
 Soulless, I carry my body among others.  
 My honey-seeking heart falls at her lotus  
 Feet. A giver never refuses one in need.  
 The hope of a desiring soul must be satisfied.  
 She is an unfathomable river, and I, a thirsty swallow  
 My intense search for her has made my vision shallow.  
 Like a lost sailor, my soul drifts in dismal ocean.  
 Now I want to anchor at the hopeful haven.  
 From this upsurge of yearning, save me, dear  
 And bring me in haste a letter from her.  
 Else I'll destroy this insect life.  
 For death is better than living in grief."  
 The prince's words aroused pity  
 In the mind of Shama, the florist lady.  
 Leaving the love begging man at her place  
 She went to meet the cause of his distress.  
 With haste she went to see the lady.  
 Rupbanu was then surprised to see  
 Her florist in that untimely hour.  
 She asked: "what is the rush, Gardener?  
 It's not yet the time for you to bring  
 My garlands, wreaths, and floral strings.  
 Why have you then come like this?"  
 The florist woman said, "I beg you, please  
 Listen to me, yet I fear to tell what  
 I dreamt. But how can I construct  
 The meaning by myself? So here I come  
 To speak to you; but fear stops me from  
 Telling you." "What's the use of keeping  
 One's dream in secret? Instead of being  
 Afraid, you must tell me your dream,"  
 Said the lady. "I dreamt of a charming Prince  
 Who saw you and fell in love. But then,  
 As he asked for your hand, the giant killed him.  
 A handsome prince he was, son of a king  
 But alas! He lost his life for loving  
 You." The moment Shama's words reached her ears  
 The hermit's daughter burst into tears.  
 Fire of love, yearning, desire, and fear  
 Burnt her heart and made her shiver.  
 For she knew what Shama's dream meant:  
 Her beloved would die and she would repent

The loss of her love. Grief shrouded her  
 And her senses fled. Then Shama took over  
 And said: "Compose yourself, sweet Lady,  
 Acknowledge him, your honey-sucking bee  
 Has arrived. He pines for you, and comes here  
 Now, you ought to fulfill his desire.  
 This alluring body you'll not have for long;  
 It'll belong to the past once this moment is gone.  
 The fruit of love is sweeter at your age;  
 Devour it now, and do not let it waste.  
 Else, when beauty and youth will depart,  
 You'll be stung by your own venomous heart.  
 It'll blame you for not enjoying the fun,  
 Of a bountiful time. Don't make it bygone!  
 Your heart will rebuke you if you do not abide  
 The infinite chances of carnal delight.  
 The shapeless lord gives you the gift  
 Of sensual palace of gold-built.  
 Your heart will blame you for igniting a fire  
 that burns to ashes such lust and desire.  
 Your wrinkled body and aging heart  
 Will be reproachful, if you let chance depart  
 Now. Your body and mind will rebel  
 If you don't besmear them with carnal spell,  
 And let them enjoy the blissful moment.  
 Make your profit in the love market  
 When you have plenty of supply of carnal wares.  
 So, claim your own booth in love's bazaar,  
 And exchange pleasure with pleasure-mongers.  
 A prince has left his kingdom with a hunger  
 That only your love can feed. Like a hapless animal  
 He is trapped within your snare. Your eyes cast a spell  
 On him; like arrows, they shot his heart  
 With an aching heart, he lives as dead,  
 He searches for your love-balm.  
 Only you can undo the harm  
 That you have done. Thus the wounded lover of yours  
 Awaits you in the dark woods.  
 He needs more pain to be cured of pain  
 Kill him now, and show your disdain.  
 Or, help me now to help him out."  
 Hearing this plea, the maiden thought,  
 It must be untrue, for why would he,  
 The lord of her soul and her destiny,  
 Would come there thus in search of her?  
 How could the best of man thus suffer  
 The pain of love that was only hers?

The very thought brought her to tears.  
 “Give me my love, where have you kept him?”  
 “Calm down,” said Shama, “I’ll tell you then.”  
 She then gave her the letter from the Prince  
 The maiden dismissed all her attendants.  
 She then went alone to a solitary temple  
 And read the letter from the Prince of Shimail.  
 Shama indeed had spoken true!  
 She read the letter through and through.  
 She felt her happiness would reach so high  
 As if she could touch the sky!  
 Darkness from her heart fled soon  
 It was as if a dwarf had reached the moon!<sup>54</sup>  
 As a dark cloud brings hope for the swallow  
 As nocturnal birds bathe in moon’s glow,  
 As a beggar feels after finding some fortune,  
 Or as a patient feels to see a wise physician,  
 As a dying soul soothes its thirst with nectar  
 As an ocean quenches the thirst of a river,  
 As a white lotus beams at moon-light  
 As a blind man feels when he regains his sight  
 As daylilies rejoice to see the sun  
 As a cripple feels to be able to run,  
 The maiden felt as such, or even more.  
 She felt ecstatic; she wanted to pour  
 Down her heart in her own words then.  
 “Make haste, and write,” says Faizun.

### *Her Letter*

#### Heading:

Dearly respectable honest soul  
 The killer of my pain, enemy, and evil,  
 Well-wisher of my friends, my guardian angel  
 Humorous and witty Srijukta Prince Jalal,  
 The epitome of virtue and beauty, and  
 The owner of the heart and soul of this poor woman,

#### The Letter

This letter is addressed at your solemn feet  
 Why do you worry for me day and night?  
 I’m the thirsty one who sits near a river

---

<sup>54</sup> A Bengali proverb, normally used to criticize a marriage of unequal social ranks; Rup, as a merchant’s daughter is (a dwarf) trying to reach a man who is beyond her reach (the moon).

But cannot quench the thirst with water.  
 If you really were struck by my love arrow  
 You should kill the giant, and resolve my sorrow.  
 With that giant living, you'll never have  
 The chance to appease your thirst for love.  
 My hands and feet are all tied, and I  
 Have no courage to stand and defy  
 My vile captor. How can you win me then,  
 If you don't free me from the hands of the demon?  
 Why should you curse me for crimes beyond me?  
 By killing the night-invader, you can save me from misery.

Another Letter:

In another letter I explain it further  
 Why do you curse me so?  
 You offend me so because you know  
 I have given myself to you.  
 Great is he of all who turns the small  
 Into the greatest by showing respect.  
 I take these words to be true and wise  
 Yet I don't know what is in my fate.  
 I feel depressed, but remember what you said  
 And try to keep your promise.  
 Take it to be true I will wait for you,  
 I am thinking of you always.  
 The storm of separation troubles love's ocean  
 And creates bellowing waves  
 I see seven heavens in a flicker of a moment  
 The next moment hells of pain I face.  
 Love and contempt together reside  
 Just as thorns live with a rose  
 Surrounded by guards I can't even shed tears  
 Shama will give you all news.  
 Signed,  
 An obedient admirer, ardently  
 waiting to be at your service,  
 Yours, truly,  
 Srimoti Rupboti Dasi

*You stay within me, yet you don't let me See*

The maiden poured her loving heart  
 Into her letter. She asked Shama to depart  
 And give that letter to her beloved  
 "Listen to me dear Gardener," she said,  
 "You are the only well-wisher I have

Please bring to me the man I love.  
 For him my heart burns with fire  
 Except him my only ally is despair.  
 To me you are like my mother.  
 Do tell him how much I suffer  
 For him. If he has but a little pity  
 He would kill the demon to rescue me.”  
 With such words she bade Shama speed.  
 She gave her money and various gifts.  
 Shama obeyed her; she went half way,  
 And found the prince waiting in dismay.  
 Shama begged him to go back so that  
 He was safe from the grip of the giant.  
 To her said the impatient prince,  
 “O, what did she say, tell me, please!”  
 Shama asked him to calm down and  
 Hide away, to be safe from the demon.  
 “It is not wise,” she said, “for you now  
 To be in public. Make haste and follow  
 Me. You will be happy to hear my words.”  
 They went to her house, and afterwards,  
 Shama told him all, and gave him the letter.  
 The prince was happy and cordially thanked her.  
 He opened the letter and his heart leapt up  
 To see that it was signed by his Rup.  
 Her letter made him feel as though  
 She was not far, but near. He knew not how  
 To control his impatient mind.  
 In her letter, he wished to find  
 His answer to how their souls, though apart,  
 Could feel each other through the same heart.  
 He wept and blamed his cruel fate:  
 “Destiny distances me from my soul-mate.  
 My beloved lives near and yet so far.  
 I am sitting beside an opulent river,  
 With a desert-thirst, but woe is me;  
 My thirst is unsated, and my destiny  
 Mocks me. My swallow heart is looking up  
 At the woman, who, by showering love,  
 Would surely satiate me. My elephant heart  
 Rebels, and now refuses to live apart  
 From its mate. O my body!” cried the Prince,  
 “With desire, it’s burning, burning, burning!”  
 Shama and the envoy both wept as well;  
 Shama narrated: “This is a sad love tale.  
 Love is like this; it takes over life, reason, and peace.  
 Its blind eyes see beauty in the ugliest face.

A beloved's face seems brighter than the moon  
 To a love-struck man. And love's devotion,  
 Defies honor and wealth, class and caste.  
 It keeps the yearning soul as an inmate  
 In the prison of the body. Two eyes are but  
 The guards of that prison. In order to escape that  
 Prison, the only option one has is to die."  
 Shama felt dejected, and with a sigh,  
 She pleaded the prince not to undertake  
 Such a fatal mission. She said it would be a mistake  
 To give up life only for love. But Jalal's mind was made.  
 He then asked Shama to tell the maiden that  
 Her prince was ready to die for her.  
 He was resolute to kill the monster.  
 He would either die or destroy that fiend,  
 He wished she would always keep him in mind.  
 Shama ran along to tell the maiden;  
 She added words and colors more  
 With his words, as she went before  
 The love-sick woman. Thus she added  
 Fuel to the pain that Rup already had.  
 The forlorn maiden cried so much,  
 Faizun fails to print them in words.

*The Wailing Woman bemoaned her Grief*

The wailing woman bemoaned her grief,  
 "O, don't let him give up his life!  
 'Tis no easy matter to battle with the demon.  
 If he wants, he can win any woman.  
 For me he must not lose his life.  
 Tell him his death I will never survive.  
 O, Shama, ask him to forget me.  
 He shouldn't put me through this misery  
 Yet, if forgetting me is so hard for him,  
 I am ready to elope with him anytime.  
 I'd rather go and live in sin  
 Than have him killed by that fiend."  
 "Fie! Shame on you!" Shama snapped,  
 "Don't you have any sense of respect?  
 Being a virgin, how can you think  
 Of committing for love the utmost sin?  
 Being a woman of class, of respectable home  
 How can you think like a low born?  
 Old as I am, older than your mother,

Even I do not have the courage to utter  
 Those shameful words. You are  
 A fearless and shameless creature!  
 You want to leave your well-wishers and friends  
 In pursuit of a life with an unknown man!"  
 Rupbanu then furiously said,  
 "Ashamed I am not. I'm not afraid.  
 What good can come from fear and humility  
 When this miserable life will flee?  
 This is what'll happen; I can promise you,  
 If my beloved dies for me, I'll die too.  
 In my heart's lagoon my lotus love thrives  
 And it will do so as long as he survives.  
 Happiness on earth I will enjoy  
 Only with him. Else I will destroy  
 The chance of life without him.  
 I will endure pains and sufferings  
 All life long, to get in the end  
 A moment of happiness with my companion.  
 Honor and name I crave none  
 If I can live with my dream-man."  
 Frightened by her frenzied words  
 Shama said, "You can go with your lord,  
 You can elope with him but then  
 Do not you know what will happen?  
 Think what the giant will do:  
 He will kill you and he'll kill us too.  
 As for myself, I don't fear to die  
 With you. But may I ask why  
 You want to push your lover  
 Towards this path of fatal danger?"  
 The maiden sighed, and at last said,  
 "Let him go then, to destroy the giant.  
 If our love is true, we'll meet then.  
 If not in this life, we will be born again  
 In another life, to share our joys.  
 But now, if he has a chance, if he destroys  
 My enemy, then let him return  
 As a brave hero. Yet, if another woman  
 Comes between, if he becomes weak  
 And gives up what he's gone to seek,  
 I'll bid him adieu. As love's martyr  
 I'll leave him with the blame of murder.  
 I'll take my life, and he be blamed.  
 I'll leave this world. I will not be ashamed.  
 Tell all this to him and pay my regards."  
 The gardener conveyed him Rupbanu's words.

The prince felt happy as she exposed  
 Her thoughts to him; he felt enthused.  
 He wanted to kill the ogre and live happily  
 In a love nest, with his dearest lady.  
 He told his own envoy, "Listen to me,  
 Stay here when I am gone away;  
 I know for sure that in her dismay  
 My queen-mother will not spare your life.  
 So, hide here; and if I survive  
 The battle, I will come for thee  
 Then with happiness we three  
 Will go home. But until that day,  
 This is where you will stay."  
 The envoy agreed; the courageous prince  
 Was then ready to face his fiend.  
 He asked, "Where do I go to find this giant?"  
 "Far to the north," the women responded.  
 In the name of the Lord, a daring man  
 Set out to accomplish a dangerous mission.

## PART 5. SEARCHING FOR THE ENEMY

### *The Journey*

The prince traveled through dark woods  
 In search of the giant; he restlessly toured  
 Through lands and forests and deep rivers.  
 After days of his endless endeavors,  
 He reached a mountainous land.  
 With much struggle he crossed it, and  
 Reached a beautiful garden in the vale.  
 Secluded it was, but it was beautiful.  
 To himself, the prince then said,  
 "This must be a fairy land.  
 A beautiful garden, like this one,  
 Is beyond the measures of mortal men."  
 He was amused to see so many kinds  
 Of flowers and plants. He could easily find  
 Diamonds, sapphires, garnets, and pearls  
 Carelessly scattered around the walls.  
 Flowers of different colors and fragrance  
 Pleased his eyes and numbed his senses.  
 Twittering birds and the fluttering wings  
 Of butterflies added melody to the tedious buzzing  
 Of bees; the scenic beauty aroused in him

An overwhelming urge to sing  
 A love song for his beloved Rup.  
 He sang a song of passionate love:

*The Song*

When the fire of yearning, of separation  
 Burns a man, he burns forever. His body burns.  
 Oh! His body burns in the flames of intense passion:  
 He burns under the sun, in moonlight, in the deep ocean!  
 He burns even when he is in cool shade.  
 O this fire of love! It burns more when he tries to put it out.  
 It burns in soothing water and underneath comforting soil.  
 Oh! This unremitting flame of fire!  
 Oh! This fiery flames of desire!  
 Oh! This fire of desire and love is so cruel,  
 It can burn forever without firewood or fuel.

*His Love song and Love Sickness*

The Prince sang thus his passionate song.  
 His yearning for Rup was so strong  
 That he fell unconscious in this magical garden.  
 Now, this garden was really in a fairy land.  
 The fairy princess, with her airy companions,  
 Used to fly in her chariot around that garden.  
 That night, Princess Gulchehra was enjoying nature's beauty,  
 But her routine was disrupted suddenly when she  
 Found a handsome human male lying unconscious.  
 In her garden. Bedazzled by his good looks, the princess  
 Ordered her charioteer to stop. She said in a stern voice,  
 "Bring him to me. Bring him back to consciousness.  
 This handsome face has a magical charm.  
 I feel a strong attraction towards him.  
 Let us leave the garden with this precious trophy.  
 Now a garden excursion doesn't interest me."  
 Her companions brought the unconscious man in.  
 The charioteer flew them to their destination.  
 Princess Gulchehra went inside her mansion  
 While her attendants tried to revive the human  
 Back to life. She asked her maids to prepare  
 The finest of the rooms for the handsome stranger.  
 She ordered them to keep him in the room  
 That was decked with precious pearls and gems.

The attendants placed him in a pearl-decked bed;  
 And the Prince lay there as if dead.  
 The Princess thought their flight through the air was the culprit  
 That stripped this man of his sense and spirit.  
 She rubbed his scalp with perfumed oil.  
 She asked her maids to message him well.  
 She sat beside his bed and fanned him for hours  
 The stranger slowly woke up feeling cool air  
 And sweet fragrance around his body.  
 He opened his eyes and saw an elegant beauty.  
 "Who are you?" He asked, "Do tell me."  
 "Why am I here? He asked anxiously.  
 "I am the daughter of the Fairy King.  
 I live in this palace, a happy virgin.  
 To me belongs this gorgeous palace.  
 I live here with my attendants.  
 I also own the garden where  
 You lay unconscious; I flew you here.  
 My attendants and I found  
 you lying unconscious on the ground.  
 I think I have said enough about me  
 Now tell me about you," said the lady.  
 The man replied, "I am a prince; my name is Jalal.  
 I come here from the land named Shimail"  
 The prince told her about his family and love.  
 He explained how his profound love for Rup  
 Brought him there. Hearing about his beloved,  
 Princess Gulchehra became dejected.  
 She cursed her fate for being such.  
 A beautiful Princess, but unmarried she was;  
 She was ready to tie her marital knots  
 With a handsome male of her own race.  
 She knew not why her father had not yet  
 Found for her a handsome mate.  
 When perchance she was able to find  
 A male handsome enough to be her husband,  
 He was of human race, and already had a lover!  
 She decided to keep him imprisoned;  
 She was confident that she would find  
 A way to reach this human's heart.  
 She was convinced that she would succeed.  
 Thus she started to work out her plan:  
 She started by trying to seduce the handsome man.  
 With passionate eyes, she looked at the prince;  
 And in a soft voice, she then started to sing:

*A Fairy Princess and her Love song*

My love, I fell in love the moment I saw you.  
 A flame of love is burning through  
 My body. A powerless female, I give up my life  
 And my soul to you. How I struggle and strive  
 To contain this overflowing passion within me!  
 Oh, this fire of love burns mercilessly!  
 Disregarding the fear of disgrace and shame  
 I brought you here; I dishonored the name  
 Of my family. O, what have I done?  
 My passionate act has lost its reason.  
 I've done all this for nothing! O, what a shame!  
 I burn for him, but he has his own flame.  
 He loves me not; he will never love me.  
 I sing my love song desolately.

*Princess Gulchehra and her Schemes*

When her love song failed to move his heart  
 Princess Gulchehra contrived another plot  
 She planned to use her feminine charm  
 To make him forget this other woman.  
 She planned to please him in such a way  
 That stormy passion would sweep away  
 All the memories of his old love.  
 So she told him: "Dearest, I have  
 Acted foolishly. I shouldn't try to tear apart  
 Memories of love from your kind heart.  
 I know you are willing to sacrifice your life for her.  
 I just ask you to rest here for at least a year;  
 Once you regain enough strength and energy,  
 you will resume your search of your lady."  
 Seeing no reaction in his face,  
 The princess felt a sudden rage.  
 She realized that her schemes have failed.  
 She became furious as she yelled,  
 "How dare you defy my whim?  
 I tell you now dear human prince,  
 You have no power to escape me.  
 Hear me now, and hear me clear:  
 You are my prisoner here.  
 You will never escape me  
 So, stay for a while and make me happy."  
 Prince Jalal knew he was in grave danger.

The fairy would kill him if he didn't please her.  
 He knew if he did not escape from this place,  
 He would never be able to see Rup's lovely face.  
 What should he do? How could he flee  
 From this harem of a powerful fairy?  
 Prince Jalal was an intelligent man  
 He came up with a clever plan:  
 "If I please her, she will let me go.  
 I would have a chance to meet Rupbanu  
 If I can escape from here,  
 I will find and destroy the ogre.  
 I will rescue Rup and make her my wife.  
 And to fulfill that dream I have to save my life."  
 He reasoned thus with his heart  
 And decided to play his part;  
 He planned to play the role of a lover.  
 He declared that he belonged to her.  
 He told her that he had a change of heart;  
 Gulchehra's face glowed with pride  
 As he promised to abide by all her whims.  
 She felt proud to be loved by him.  
 The sun departed to take his day's rest.  
 She ordered her maids to prepare a feast.  
 The servants prepared delicious dishes;  
 Some were busy preparing the beds.  
 Others brought food and served with care.  
 Jalal and Gulchehra had a lavish dinner.  
 They ate and bathed, and then lay together  
 While he lay motionless in the pretense  
 Of a sleeping man, she waited to be awakened by a kiss.  
 For three nights they slept like this;  
 He thought of Rup while the princess lay restless.  
 Never in her life she had seen such a man,  
 Who could resist sensual temptations  
 So easily. It really was an insult for her  
 That this human male refused to please her.  
 She shed her tears of pain of rejection.  
 And after three long hungry nights of pain  
 The princess expressed her anger and disgust  
 Towards this woman, whose image in his heart  
 Was stronger than the physical presence  
 Of the most beautiful Fairy princess!  
 An invisible woman shouldn't steal Gulchehra's love.  
 So, she said, "Wicked man! You should not have  
 Shown this audacity to test my patience!  
 I tried to be kind, but you are heartless.  
 I brought you here disregarding honor and grace,

I took such a risk to keep you in this place.  
 You are so below my rank! Yet, I tended you with care  
 Senseless man! Why have I brought you here?  
 Are you dimwitted? Do you have no clue?  
 Don't you realize what treasure awaits you?  
 Imprudent man! Do you know how to value a jewel!  
 How can you be so cold and so cruel?  
 You humans are like peacocks, owls, or mice;  
 You can only mate with the females of your own species.  
 An ugly crow cannot befriend a cuckoo bird.  
 Love cannot conquer an ugly heart.  
 It's natural for a dog to crave for nasty food  
 He wouldn't appreciate a good meal served on a plate of gold.  
 A low breed can never bring forth  
 Good harvest. You get just what you are worth.  
 Else, why do you slight the wishes of  
 The prettiest of fairies, and reject her love?  
 We fairies surpass your women in beauty,  
 But still you hanker after the ugly  
 Woman named Rupbanu, who, I am sure  
 Cannot give you as much sexual pleasure  
 As I can. If you still ignore my demand,  
 I will take your life. Then you'll lose the chance  
 To meet the woman you long to meet."  
 Her harsh words made Jalal quite afraid.  
 Holding her hands, he knelt down:  
 "Forgive the fault of this insolent man.  
 You are the ocean of desire and  
 I am but your slave. Now reprimand  
 My sin and accept me as your lover."  
 Like patients infected with carnal pleasure,  
 They sought remedy of their disease  
 In each other. Jalal indulged in the act to please  
 The princess. Opportunity finally arrived  
 For Gulchehra to consummate her love.  
 She was contented; she felt complete.  
 Jalal sacrificed his mental peace.  
 He decided to do what it would take  
 To be a free man; so, for Rup's sake  
 He gave himself up to that fairy princess;  
 He embraced her and showered her with kisses.  
 They ate and bathed and slept together.  
 They woke at dawn only to resume their  
 Game of love. Time flew away  
 As they enjoyed each other's company.  
 Yet, Gulchehra's loving caresses  
 Were not powerful enough to erase

Rup's memory from Jalal's heart.  
 Months went by as he lived there. But  
 One day the fairy queen found out  
 The secret affair of her only child.  
 To Princess Gulchehra, she sent her maid,  
 With the news that the fairy mother had  
 A sudden desire to see her daughter.  
 The princess feared that her secret affair  
 Was secret no more. She went to see  
 Her lover; she told him that she would be  
 Back soon if all were well. She knew that soon  
 Their life would be over, for the Fairy Queen  
 Would surely kill her and her human lover;  
 Indeed it was a crime for a fairy princess  
 to fall in love with a male of a lowly species.  
 "Good bye, my love," she told Jalal,  
 "I will come back soon if all goes well."  
 I leave you with my maids who will look after you."  
 Leaving Jalal in that palace, Gulchehra flew  
 To meet the Queen of the Fairy kingdom  
 The Fairy Queen greeted her with affection:  
 "My dear child, I haven't seen you for days!  
 Stay with me now." She then kissed her face.  
 Gulchehra thought since her mother knew nothing,  
 She would soon be able to return to her prince  
 And resume enjoying love's utmost pleasure.  
 In the meantime, the Fairy Queen had her  
 Secret plan. She sent a servant to find out the man  
 In Gulchehra's palace and throw him into the ocean.  
 The servant obeyed her mistress. She flew  
 With Jalal and dropped him in the sea. No one knew.

*In Deep Trouble*

The prince then was in an endless ocean.  
 He floated and drifted, then sank again.  
 The Lord must have compassion for a lover;  
 Otherwise, he could not have survived that danger.  
 Love is precious and love binds all.  
 Love makes you rise, and then it lets you fall.  
 Jalal's love for Rup therefore,  
 Brought him back from death's door.  
 The Lord placed a corpse in front of the drowning lover,  
 He used it to float for days in water.  
 For seven nights and seven days

Holding the corpse, he floated. Then the tidal waves  
 Brought him ashore, and there he lay  
 Unconscious, for three long days.  
 When he woke up finally,  
 He looked around but could not see  
 Any signs of life. He was tired and hungry;  
 He then ate some fruit that grew by the sea  
 After gathering strength, he waded slowly  
 Towards no direction. Feeling hopeless, he  
 Sat by the shore; bitter was his heart  
 Destiny had moved him apart  
 From his love. Thus he sat by the sea.  
 and sang a tune of melancholy:

The Song:

My crazy love has ruined me, alas!  
 The Lord has never let me in peace.  
 Oh! Lord, what a cruel Lord you are!  
 O, Lord how you make me suffer!  
 You make me suffer.  
 Maybe, just maybe I have been  
 Living in some loathing sin;  
 Maybe the Lord has punished me  
 For my sin; this misery  
 I have brought on to me.  
 It is all my wrongdoings  
 Indeed it is for all the sins  
 I have committed.  
 I am ill-fated.  
 I am to blame.  
 Guilty I am.  
 Why should the Lord Almighty  
 Punish me if I am not guilty?  
 Lord, please take away; take this life away.  
 End this sinful life.  
 I do not want to live  
 A life of sin and misery.  
 Dear Lord, please forgive me.  
 I want to die. Lord, fulfill my wish  
 Take away my life if you really want to punish.  
 Almighty Lord, if you want to punish,  
 Then let me die! Lord, fulfill my wish!

*The Prince and his Rescuer*

The repentant prince kept on lamenting  
 And then he fell unconscious.  
 He lay as if he was tired and asleep.  
 The Lord forgave him seeing thus  
 The merciful Lord always takes an effort  
 To show mercy upon a repenting soul.  
 He sent Khaza Khizir<sup>55</sup> then to save the desolate man,  
 And help him reach his goal.  
 Khizir thus went to that distant island;  
 He found the repentant man.  
 He asked the man to have courage and hope,  
 He asked him to be strong again.  
 For a single moment Jalal had the illusion  
 That his beloved Rup was there.  
 Then he thought that the one who left  
 Him in the ocean came to be his rescuer.  
 Khizir approached and said, "Child,  
 Fear not, for you will have your reward.  
 What you desire, you'll get. Have no fear,  
 Be strong and move forward."  
 "Who are you? May I ask you  
 From where you have come hence?  
 I want to know and serve him who  
 Has come to save me," said the prince.  
 "My presence is but the will of the Lord  
 To fulfill your wish I am sent."  
 Khizir said thus. And the prince was  
 Grateful, but he also lamented his fate.  
 He said he was miserable and sad  
 He was too far away from his love.  
 He told Khizir all about his suffering soul  
 And Khizir then gave him hope.  
 He said he knew the knowledge true  
 With which one could kill the giant.  
 He asked Jalal then to close his eyes, and  
 He asked Jalal to hold his hand.  
 Khizir then flew taking Jalal with him to  
 The place where the giant resided.  
 Reaching that land Jalal complained  
 His heart would never rest  
 Until he found the evil demon  
 And destroyed its evil heart.

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<sup>55</sup> In Islamic folk legend, Khizir was a patron saint of the sailors, who had the power to walk over oceans, bend or divide the seas. See Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*, 63.

But the Lord's spokesman told Jalal then  
 Killing the ogre was hard.  
 For Fortas had power to deceive over  
 All mortals in such a way that  
 His body was but a strong façade  
 In it he didn't keep his heart.  
 He had the command over his heart  
 And his own life. With a magical spell  
 He took out his soul. He kept a beautiful  
 Bird named Hirammon who carried his soul.  
 So his soul resided in Hirammon, the bird;  
 He was deathless if the bird was unharmed.  
 Jalal's task was then to capture Hirammon  
 And kill it to kill the giant.  
 Khizir then unfolded to Jalal, the secret,  
 He told him where to find Hirammon.  
 "God helps if one seeks help  
 Seek refuge in God," says Faizun.

*Prince Jalal Destroyed his Enemy*

As it was the wish of Lord Almighty  
 Khaza Khizir taught Jalal three  
 Magical spells. He then said, "Prince  
 Let me explain what magical things  
 You can achieve with these spells. For the first,  
 Just as you don't see with your eyes shut  
 None would see you when the spell is cast,  
 With eyes closed. You earn speed and invisibility  
 You fly like air; no one sees you but you can see  
 Everything far and near. With the second one, pay attention,  
 With the second spell you can kill that bird, Hirammon.  
 It will give you the power to easily enter  
 Even the places that have no windows and door.  
 The third spell—listen what unique power it has:  
 In a war combat, you can take a blade of grass  
 In your palm, and with your wish then,  
 You can turn that grass into a unique weapon.  
 And with that weapon, what can I say,  
 Humans, fairies, ogres, and giants, all you can slay  
 With one easy stroke." With these words  
 Khizir vanished. The prince walked towards  
 The lake beside the castle, where stayed  
 The Hirammon bird. For hours, the prince waited.  
 At last an ogress came out from the castle, carrying a pitcher  
 To fetch water from yonder lake. The prince was repelled to see her.

Her ugliness could turn a day into a dark night.  
     In order to be out of her sight,  
 Jalal cast the first spell and became invisible  
 He then followed her back to the giant's castle.  
 The prince then searched but could not locate  
     The secret room where the bird was kept.  
 Then he remembered; he knew how he could  
     Reach the bird without any effort  
     He cast the second spell Khizir taught him:  
     As closed his eyes, he could envision the room  
     Where the bird was kept. In the blink of an eye  
     He reached the place. Being invisible, he easily  
     Could fool the guards. His powerful spell  
     Disabled the phantom guards; they all fell  
     And vanished, for they were not real. In the room  
 He found two birds in two separate cages. The prince took them  
     And carried them out. The female bird was the carrier  
 Of the life of Fortas' mother. Fortas' life was hidden in the other  
 Bird. The moment Jalal touched the cages, Fortas knew  
     His life was at stake. Angry Fortas and his mother flew  
     Towards the castle, to save their birds. People from far  
     Could hear their deafening scream and shattering roar.  
 When he saw them, the frightened prince at once chopped  
 The head of one bird; Fortas gave a last howl and dropped dead.  
     The giant's mother screeched, and flew to kill Jalal.  
 He chopped the head of the other bird. The ogress also fell.  
     The ferocious king and the mother of monsters  
     Were finally destroyed. Then thousands of angry ogres  
     Approached Jalal with their vicious weapons.  
     With a fierce force they attacked the prince,  
 Jalal felt helpless; then suddenly he remembered  
     The third spell: he plucked a tender blade  
     Of grass. He then turned that grass into a sword  
 And fought the giants. With one magical sword he fought them all.  
     The monsters stood still; so strong was the spell!  
     So powerful was the grace of God that  
     A powerless human, with his grass-made sword  
     Could kill countless ogres with one blow!  
     The demons were frightened. They knew not how  
     They lost the fight. The lakes surrounding that place  
     Became dark with blood of monsters, ogres, and giants.  
     As the defeated giants fled towards the forest  
 So went the prince. He hunted them out, and with a restless  
     Hand, he killed them all. The champion then  
     Praised his Lord. Faizun says, "Wise men,  
     Remember, it was because the Lord was so generous,  
     That the prince could win his war with a blade of grass."

*In King Zamzam's Land*

After defeating the fiends      the famished prince  
     Sat beside a tree in the forest.  
 He looked around      but he found  
     Nothing that he could eat.  
 He began to wander      for food and water  
     And he ate some wild fruit.  
 With the intention      of finding human habitation  
     He quickly walked through the woods.  
 He crossed the forest      he did not take a rest  
     Until he came near a mountain.  
 Yonder he could see      human locality,  
     But a big river stood in between.  
 There was no ferry.      So how could he  
     Go to the other side?  
     He was eager      to cross that river  
     And be a part of the human crowd.  
     The spells that      he was taught  
     Came then to his rescue.  
 With eyes closed      he wished to cross  
     The river; and he flew  
     Within seconds      he reached the lands  
     He asked the people what was the name  
 Of that beautiful land      and its king. And  
 They told him the king's name was Zamzam.  
 They also told him      how King Zamzam  
     Battled with Fortas and his giants.  
 Zamzam claimed      the land from Fortas and renamed  
     It "the land of harvest."  
     Zamzam's men      cultivated the land  
     They built the city which had  
     Now become      the peaceful home  
 Of the powerful King, named Zamzam.  
 They were waiting there      for the evil monster,  
     This monster had tainted the king's name.  
     Giant Fortas had      once abducted  
     Princess Nurbanu from her garden.  
 To save his daughter's name,      the angry King Zamzam  
     Killed her with his own hand.  
     Ever since then      the king had been waiting  
     For the wicked giant, who  
 Abducted his daughter.      The king blamed the monster  
     For the death of Princess Nurbanu.  
     Prince Jalal said      he intended  
     To meet King Zamzam. But he  
     Never perceived,      this sudden visit

Would change his destiny.  
 As he walked, people followed.  
 Even those who didn't join,  
 Looked back, for never before  
 They had seen such a handsome man.  
 Women saw him from their homes  
 And wished that they could flee  
 From that dull place. They were jealous  
 And lustful for the stranger; but he  
 Paid no notice. He moved towards  
 The palace. As he reached the gate,  
 His beauty charmed even the armed  
 Guards of king Zamzam's palace.  
 They stood awestruck; Jalal then asked  
 The chief guard to inform the king  
 That from a distant, prosperous land  
 Had come a curious Prince.  
 The guard expressed his greatest surprise  
 To his King saying, "here comes a man  
 Whose charm and grace were so immense  
 That even men are aroused with passion!"  
 Who could then blame women  
 If they felt the same?  
 That charming Prince had come hence  
 To pay his respect to King Zamzam.  
 King Zamzam ordered his men  
 To show the prince due homage.  
 Prince Jalal thus entered the palace  
 And charmed the whole court with his grace.  
 Even the king experienced the feeling  
 Of enchantment to behold  
 A man so attractive. All sat still, as if  
 They were thunder-struck. The old  
 King then rose and took Jalal by the hand.  
 Then he asked him politely:  
 "Tell me who you are why do you wander  
 In strange lands? Tell me all," said he,  
 "A handsome man, it must have been  
 Hard for your parents to permit you  
 To travel this way. What dismay  
 Has caused this yearning in you?"  
 A sad heart, the prince then revealed.  
 He told the king everything:  
 His love for a lady his life of misery  
 His adventures and sufferings;  
 His battle with the giants his glorious defiance  
 And his victory in the war against the giants

The prince said all.      The people of the royal  
 Court were impressed of his strength.  
 They all applauded      and they all agreed  
 That Prince Jalal had a brave heart.  
 The royal court and      the man on the throne  
 Were convinced, Faizun observed.

## PART 6. THE CHANGE OF FATE

### *King Zamzam's Plan*

As he heard the story of the gallant man  
 King Zamzam made a secret plan.  
 He thought Prince Jalal and his second daughter  
 Would definitely make a handsome pair.  
 His daughter Hurbanu was an enchanting beauty,  
 He wanted to perform his fatherly duty  
 By giving her away to a man who  
 Deserved to be the husband of Princess Hurbanu.  
 He wanted thus to give her in marriage  
 To a man, who had confidence and courage.  
 He also wished to keep the bride and the groom  
 Forever with him. He would bestow his kingdom  
 To his son-in-law. King Zamzam was impressed by  
 The narratives of Prince Jalal's gallantry.  
 Jalal was the perfect match for his daughter.  
 He wanted to keep Jalal as his son-in-law. Therefore,  
 He implored the prince to stay a while and rest,  
 Before Jalal resumed his love-quest.  
 Once well-rested, he would revive easily,  
 The strength, which he needed in his journey.  
 He'd be ready to meet the woman of his passion.  
 King Zamzam then ordered his men  
 To prepare a lavish bed in a luxurious suite.  
 Jalal was given a relaxing bath. The royal masseuse  
 Gave him a massage while fanners restlessly fanned.  
 A lavish dinner was served. The prince felt entertained.  
 He felt relaxed and fell asleep. The clever king then  
 Told his counselors: "This prince from a renowned realm.  
 Has impressed me tremendously with his grace.  
 He had the strength and manly prowess  
 To defy and defeat those nocturnal creatures  
 We failed to destroy. How did this mortal cross  
 A vast ocean, so quick, without any boat!  
 Is it possible for a mortal to fly or float?"

Else, how is it that this man comes here  
 Swifter than a bird? I will have no fear,  
 If such a brave hero lives here and weds  
 My daughter. I want you now to request  
 Him to marry Hurbanu." His counselors approached Jalal.  
 The courteous Prince greeted them all.  
 The wise men sat, and one by one,  
 They started to persuade the Prince then.  
 That tried to convince the prince to  
 Agree to marry Princess Hurbanu.  
 That a wedding between Hurbanu and the Prince  
 Would be one of privilege and good fortune,  
 For the Prince would ascend the throne  
 After the king, who did not have a son  
 To inherit his land. The prince listened.  
 Then he said: "If I ever had the intent  
 To be a king, why would I, in the first place,  
 Forsake my own kingdom? Let me tell this  
 I am a slave of love. It's not the Princess  
 But Rupbanu I love. I only live for her and, no one else  
 Can replace her. Please ask me no further."  
 Hearing his words, the advisers left in despair.  
 They informed their king; and the king lost his patience  
 He sent his men to warn the Prince  
 That refusal would surely put him in grave danger.  
 So went back the group of royal advisers.  
 They advised the prince to accept the offer;  
 His marriage with a simple Merchant's daughter  
 Would not be as prosperous as this one.  
 He would master fortune by becoming the son  
 Of King Zamzam through this marriage with his daughter.  
 Surely, a man of his stature deserved a better  
 Companion. When sweet words failed, they began to scold:  
 "How can you take copper when you are offered gold?  
 You are offered nectar, but you pester for poison.  
 It's not in the nature of a respectable man  
 To disregard his class and marry someone  
 Of lower rank. By doing so, you'll insult your own clan.  
 Besides, how dare you slight a princess  
 For a merchant's daughter? You will face  
 The consequences of your rejection soon.  
 You'll have to spend your life in our prison.  
 You'll not be able to fulfill your dream,  
 If you fail to comply with King Zamzam."  
 After insulting him with such cruel words,  
 The advisors left; as he sat alone,  
 Prince Jalal tried to find a solution

To this problem; he could see none.  
 He found himself entrapped again.  
 The wretched man felt hopeless and cried.  
     Neither he ate nor did he rest.  
 He tried to calm down; but all he could do,  
 Was remember the lovely face of Rupbanu.  
     The kind King now became wicked;  
 He ordered that the prince should be kept  
 In a dungeon, with his hands and feet tied.  
 And a huge rock should be placed on his chest,  
     So that he would be confined completely.  
 Since he was crazy for love, he would now be  
     Totally insane. Imprisonment and hunger  
     Would make him go mad. But even after  
     Such torment, if he refused, he should  
 Be tortured to death. "This is the power of God,  
     He could do or undo any pain or pleasure.  
 He let us be saved by the foe and killed by the savior  
     Who can fathom his wondrous design?  
     We are only to endure," comments Faizun.

*The Prisoner's Lament*

The prisoner of Zamzam      cried in the dungeon:  
     "O dear Lord, I fail to comprehend  
     The game you play.      You take away  
     My pains and foes, and then you suddenly send  
 A foe in a friend's mask.      O, why? I ask,  
     Oh! Where is she for whom I suffer?  
     How I suffer!      The news wouldn't reach her.  
     O, this pain is too much to bear!  
     Alas! My soul,      I could kill the foul  
     Night-creatures. I could even come this far.  
     Fool I was      to believe once  
     If I could kill the captor of my lover,  
 I would live happy.      For I could marry  
     The woman whom I love so true.  
     But woe is me!      My destiny  
     Has turned my friend to a foe!  
 My prolonged absence      will erase my existence  
     From the memory of my beloved  
     I see no way out.      I wish I could  
     Leave all this. I wish I were dead.  
     Is there some hope?      Can somehow my love  
     Find out why I am not with her?

Among Lord's benevolent creatures  
 Is there someone with the power  
 To save, or to help? O, I loathe myself!  
 To please that power, I would do anything!  
 Lord Almighty, Please rescue me  
 From the wrath of a wicked king  
 Dear free wind! You know my mind  
 Do take this news, and convey  
 My love to her, tell her how I suffer  
 Tell her I am withering away.  
 What a difficult game of heart  
 I have chosen to play!  
 My long dark nights or bright daylights  
 For her I have given away."  
 The prince thus lamented. He was  
 Losing his hope and strength  
 "But the reliance on God's benevolence  
 Saves us;" Faizun says, "so, have faith."

*Khizir's Advice to Jalal*

The prisoner Prince was tormented hence.  
 He was confined; he refused even  
 To eat a morsel of rice. He preferred to starve  
 To death than marry a princess he did not love.  
 At last the Lord took pity on him. He sent Khaza Khizir again,  
 Who came in an old man's shape. Jalal asked the old man,  
 "From where you come, and what brings you in?"  
 "With such care I taught you spells," said the old man,  
 "Fool, you forget to use in need!" "Forgive me, sir," replied Jalal  
 "Outwitted by fear, I forgot to use them. I forgot them all.  
 Now when I try to recall the spell, memory betrays.  
 Now help me remember so that I can leave this place,  
 And go to my Rup." Gravely Khaza Khizir then said,  
 "I cannot amend what you were reluctant to keep. Yet  
 I can assure that God does what He thinks is the best  
 For us. You are destined to marry this princess. In fact,  
 That is why you were brought to this Land of Harvest.  
 You'll not be free from this until you consent.  
 Marry the princess and free yourself from this dungeon."  
 Having said this, the *pir* then disappeared. Jalal realized  
 That he was destiny's slave; he decided to abide  
 By the laws of fate. And next morn, as his tormentors came,  
 "I agree to marry on one condition," He told them,  
 "I want to go home after the wedding,

I will come back with my mother's blessing  
 And take my bride home. I promise to return.  
 I'll come back for her; after all, she would earn  
 Through marriage, the right of my company.  
 Do not fear; I will not desert my responsibility."  
 When King Zamzam heard this, he agreed.  
 After the wedding, he would let Jalal visit  
 His own land. The crisis was resolved. And soon  
 All were happy, and so was Faizun.

*The Wedding Ceremony*

Being ordered by the King, preparations for the wedding  
 Thus started to take place.  
 The podium was made and was gorgeously adorned  
 Family, friends, and everyone else  
 Shared the fun. Beautiful women  
 And pretty courtesans began to dance.  
 Some started to sing while others were dancing,  
 Waving their waists and hips, placing their hands  
 Gleefully over their bosom. The loud beat of the drum  
 Mingled with the melodious flute.  
 Violin, *sitar*, trumpet along with the drum-beat  
 Orchestrated an enchanting mood.  
 All were so happy, they watched gleefully  
 Women's dancing bodies.  
 Fire works cracked rainbow light sparked  
 And the ceremony continued all night.  
 The queen mother then gave permission  
 To the women to attend the virgin-bride.  
 King Zamzam asked his men to take the prince  
 And give him the ritual bath.  
 The bride and the groom in separate rooms  
 Were given their baths. They both  
 Were clad with gorgeous clothes  
 And the bride was adorned with gold.  
 Her companions then sang wedding songs.  
 To the dais the couple was brought.  
 Together they sat and they uttered  
 The marital vow together.  
 Female attendants placed blades of green grass  
 Over the newly-weds. Their  
 Wedding rituals continued thus  
 And it took hours to complete  
 The ceremony. It ended eventually.

The wedding guests enjoyed the feast.  
 "I tried my best to keep it precise  
 I avoided detailed description.  
 In brief, I'll say, all ended with joy  
 You can guess the rest," says Faizun.

*A Marriage Unconsummated*

Even though the prince agreed to wed  
 He abstained from consuming the fruit  
 Of that marriage. What should have happened  
 Between a new bride and her husband,  
 Did not take place. The beautiful bride  
 Awaited all night to be passionately caressed  
 By her husband. She was ashamed to express  
 Her feelings for him. She tried to suppress  
 Her emotions; yet her aroused body  
 Felt neglected as she shed her tears silently.  
 She repressed her emotions, and nobody knew  
 She burnt with desire, like the morning dew  
 That burns silently with the touch of the morning sun.  
 Days passed thus; her face lost its shine.  
 Seeing her behave so uncommonly strange  
 Her attendants worried; they came askance:  
 Why didn't she follow the ritual by  
 Taking an early-morning bath after the first night? Why  
 Didn't he show them a happy face?  
 Could it be that behind his masculine grace,  
 Lived an impotent man who had no desire?  
 This looked odd. They wanted to ask her.  
 Some were shy though, to ask directly.  
 But one of them was bold. "Let me  
 approach her with this question," she said,  
 "To me she used to confide her secrets.  
 I know she will also tell me if there is  
 Something wrong. I will not fear to face  
 The prince. I'll ask him why he is so heartless.  
 If you are hesitant, I will go alone to the Prince."  
 Others agreed to accompany her. Faizun notes  
 They all approached the Prince who quietly sat,  
 They asked, "May we speak, your Highness?"  
 "Yes," he said in a depressed voice.

*Hurbanu's Attendants Challenged Prince Jalal*

Listen, your majesty!<sup>56</sup>  
 Listen your majesty, ashamed are we, but we still want to know  
 Kindly tell your servants, what went wrong, where and how?  
     Why, you, a witty man,  
 Why, you, a witty man, keep your woman in such depression?  
 Are you in love with some other female? Who is the other one?  
     Tell us the fact,  
     Tell us the fact, who is that? Do tell us everything.  
 Seeing you so hurt, we also feel sad, O, dear Prince,  
     What can we say?  
 What can we say, what dismay has brought us thus  
     Afraid we are to inquire, but still we will ask.  
     We want to know,  
 We want to know, why and how, things look so depressed  
 With your newly wedded wife, O Prince, why don't you have sex?  
     This is so uncommon!  
 This is so uncommon! You're vigorous man, and it's hard to believe  
 How you refuse to consummate your marriage with your wife.  
     What kind of a lover!  
 What kind of a lover you are! We wonder; tell us what's your plan?  
 Why don't you satiate your sensual thirst with this tender virgin!  
     Listen, you, Lover-Kanai!<sup>57</sup>  
 Listen, you, lover—Kanai! We die, we die, when we reveal,  
     How the blazing fire of your love is killing that damsel.  
     She is a King's daughter.  
 She is a King's daughter, and we know her as the prettiest ever  
     Beauty and virtue she has all. You're lucky to have her.  
     You are a King's son.  
 You are a King's son, a virtuous man, what else can we say to you?  
 Hundreds of servants like us you have in your command. Please do  
     Try to realize;  
     Try to realize, when we say this: gossip is going round  
 That you are not manful enough! That you're impotent!  
     What a shame!  
     What a shame! To have a bad name for no reason!  
 Clear yourself, and prove to all that you are a real man.  
     We'll say no more  
 We'll say no more, it is your other dream that will not come true

<sup>56</sup> The verse form is different here from the rest of the text. Faizunnesa is using the format of popular folk songs or recital, known as *Jari gaan*. Basically it has three lines, one short line is followed by two longer end-rhymed lines; the first short line is repeated in the first part of every second line of each stanza. There are also rhyming words within a line marked with a caesura.

<sup>57</sup> Another name for Krishna.



I wandered around      I almost found  
     My heart; again, I let it disappear.  
 I suffered here      I was a prisoner  
     Of your king, and of my own hope.  
 I am free but      the wound of my heart  
 Will only be cured by the woman I love.  
 Besides the Lord,      who would know what  
     Goes within my mind?  
 Only one is able      to feel how he struggles,  
 The one who knows all this, is Faizun.

*Rupbanu*

Friends of the bride heard what the prince said,  
     With angered heart they all then left.  
 Prince Jalal stayed miserable as he had been  
 In the meantime, let us see what is going on  
     In the land of Omar Nagar,  
     Where Rup was awaiting her lover.  
 Since the prince did not return from his journey  
     Rupbanu was worried for her beloved's safety.  
 She feared that the giant might have killed him.  
 She was also jealous, and suspected that the Prince  
     Was having a good time with another woman.  
 First she was mad; then she was afraid the next moment,  
     She spent her hours shedding tears for her lover;  
     She waited anxiously for the return of her savior.  
     She lamented for not having an opportunity  
     To enjoy the pleasures of sensuality.  
     She lamented to have suffered tremendous pain  
     At such a young age. She longed to be with the man  
     She loved. She mourned and she wept. She blamed  
 The roaring wind. "Fair wind, you have too much freedom!" she said,  
     "To be in all places at once. I am a powerless woman;  
 I have no way of knowing the whereabouts of the only man  
     I love. Besides you, no one can help me.  
 I beg you to seek him out for me. O, where is he?"  
     She called the gardener and told her,  
     "Dear gardener of mine, you brought him to me.  
     Now bring me his news. For he's my destiny.  
     I will die for him; I will swallow poison  
     And end this life. There is no reason  
     For me to live, if I am not his. Without my heart  
 How can I live? My body and my soul can't live apart.  
     My anguished heart suffers and so does my body.

O, this passion of desire! It consumes me.  
 The moment I fell in love's ocean  
 Worldly affairs were nothing but poison  
 To me. Only a lover knows the pain I go through.  
 Love makes one soul out of two.  
 Life is beautiful when the two are together  
 Until separation brings ugly despair.  
 The lovers become prisoners of separation  
 And they suffer until they are together again.  
 Bring him to me, dear Gardener, I plea.  
 If my soul doesn't return, my body will flee."  
 The old gardener tried to console:  
 "Be patient, dear Lady, patience is all.  
 Patience adds peace and beauty to everything.  
 But impatience brings forth destruction.  
 Endurance enables our life to prosper.  
 Frustration invites unfathomable despair.  
 Patience pleases our Lord Almighty.  
 Have patience; you'll meet your destiny."  
 Consoling her thus, the gardener left.  
 To Jalal's envoy she then went.  
 She told the envoy, for her master  
 Rupbanu suffered. The angry gardener  
 Then asked her to find out the Prince  
 And save the damsel from this suffering.  
 The two old women then agreed that  
 The envoy would bring the wanderer back.  
 The gardener said, "next to the land of Fortas  
 There lies a place called the Land of Harvest.  
 And if our brave prince did succeed  
 In killing the giant, he might want to visit  
 that land that is ruled by King Zamzam."  
 The old envoy promised to find him.  
 Rupbanu then wrote a letter to her lover  
 And gave it to the lady. In it she expressed her  
 Love and suffering. She prayed that  
 The letter reached her lover's hand.

*Rupbanu's Letter*

"With regards, I politely ask,  
 Why do you neglect me thus?  
 My lotus heart dies without sunlight  
 A night lily blooms only in bright  
 Moon. The little swallow pines for

The rain. Without bees the beauty of flower  
 Is useless. Amphibians cannot live on dry lands.  
 Night is but a dark forest without moonbeams.  
 Without you I am but a ghost, a lifeless object,  
 I do what I have to do—I sleep, wake up, and wait.  
     Food or fun, life's joy and laughter  
     Attract me no more when you aren't here.  
     When I sleep or when I am awake  
     I only think of your handsome face.  
 When sleep comes, with it comes your image  
 My heart aches. My eyes don't want to rest.  
     My two eager eyes and one aching heart  
     Look for you. Only Lord knows how hard  
     It is to live without you, my love.  
     I still live thinking there is some hope  
     I still believe the day will reach me,  
     When pain will be gone. God Almighty  
     Knows what goes in my mind. O, cruel lover,  
 Where are you? Who is the woman who has her  
 Influence over you? With whom are you having  
 The sensual fun? You went to destroy my fiend,  
 So long ago. Did you kill him? Are you in danger?  
 If you are alive, then what keeps you wherever you are?  
     All these questions trouble me so much! Dear,  
 I can't endure it! With this letter I send your own messenger.  
     If she finds you, do come back with her.  
     If my two mortal eyes do not see their  
     Love, my body will have no will to live.  
     I will put an end to my miserable life!"  
 The passionate lover expressed her emotion  
 She then signed her name at the very bottom.  
     Putting the letter in an envelope, Rupbanu  
     Gave it to her gardener, asking her to  
     Give it to the envoy. She requested her  
 To keep it safe. She said she wanted the letter  
     To be delivered directly to the prince.  
     She wished that her tale of suffering  
     Might reach her lover and bid him speed.  
     The old gardener also agreed.

*In Search of a Lost Prince*

With Rup's letter, Ramabati, then left.  
 She promised that she would try her best  
 To locate the lost prince and bring him with her.

It was a long journey. She traveled for almost a year.  
 From lands through rivers to cities and towns,  
 She searched for the prince. She traveled along  
 Until she reached King Zamzam's realm.  
 She asked people, "Have you seen a handsome Prince?"  
 People told her that a Prince indeed came  
 And married their princess. "He had no shame!"  
 Thought the envoy, "Man is cruel; otherwise how  
 Can he marry someone, leaving Rup in sorrow?  
 How can he forget his love? Has he no compassion?  
 What is he made of? Is he made of stone?  
 How easily he finds his own happiness!  
 Rup suffers for him while he marries a princess!  
 Once he was dying for Rupbanu's love.  
 He won her heart; he gave her hope  
 That he would claim her as his own;  
 He left his land and he left his crown,  
 To win Rupbanu. Now that she is won  
 He disregards her. What an Iron-hearted man!"  
 Ramabati felt upset and wanted to see  
 With her own eyes, how happy  
 Was the prince, with his new bride;  
 So she went to the palace gate.  
 She asked the sentry to tell the new groom  
 That an old woman wanted to meet him.  
 When the sentry informed the prince,  
 He knew it was no one but his  
 Own envoy. He quickly came to the gate.  
 He escorted the woman to a private place.  
 He was eager to hear about Rup.  
 He wanted to know how was his Love?  
 The angry envoy retorted, saying  
 He did not deserve the innocent maiden  
 When he was with another woman. Who  
 Would have thought a good king's son to  
 Be so immoral? The despondent man  
 Then told her what made him abandon  
 His princely promise. He explained  
 That he was forced to consent;  
 It was only to save his own life.  
 He told her that he has deprived his new wife  
 From marital pleasures for he was still true  
 To Rupbanu. He was a wretched man who  
 Was cheated by fate. His words softened  
 The old lady. She gave him the letter, and  
 Told him how Rup loved him and waited  
 For his return. The love letter just added

Fuel to the fire of love. The two then sat  
 And came out with a plan. Jalal approached  
 King Zamzam. He asked for the royal permission  
 To leave for his own land; this old woman  
 Brought the news that his Queen Mother  
 Was in her death-bed, and she wished to see her  
 Only child. The King gave his permission sadly.  
 He then ordered his men to prepare the dowry  
 From the royal treasure. He wanted his daughter  
 To take with her a dowry worthy of a King's heir.  
 But Jalal argued he would go alone first. And  
 He would tell his mother about the wedding.  
 Then he would come back to take with him  
 His queen. His words pleased King Zamzam  
 He agreed to the plan and ordered that  
 Royal boats should be prepared  
 For his son-in-law. Prince Jalal went to see his wife;  
 He promised to come back. Hurbanu accepted her life  
 As an unhappy woman; she wept silently,  
 While Jalal began his journey.

#### PART 7. THE JOURNEY BACK

##### *Troubles Waiting in the Way*

The overjoyed prince then began seafaring.  
 He was happy to see the day that would bring  
 His beloved to him. Every moment of every day,  
 He thought of Rup. He would think and pray  
 For the well being of the woman he loved.  
 The peaceful mood was soon destroyed;  
 Once, Jalal was enjoying the fresh sea breeze.  
 Suddenly a vicious big eagle flew over the Prince.  
 With a sudden speed it aimed down;  
 It snatched Jalal, and flew up again  
 Above the clouds; Attendants sailors felt helpless  
 As the eagle flew away carrying their Prince.  
 Who would have thought danger would come,  
 In a bird's shape? The old messenger woman  
 Screamed and cried as she asked the sailors  
 To take her ashore. She wanted to look for  
 The prince. She had no heart to return to Rupbanu  
 Without Jalal. The sailors said they were in danger too;  
 They knew King Zamzam and his daughter  
 Would punish them for leaving Jalal in such danger.

They all wanted to help Ramabati in her quest.  
 So, Ramabati and King Zamzam's sailors started  
 Their journey in search of the lost Prince. Meanwhile,  
     Let us follow the big flying eagle.  
     The eagle landed on a mountain top.  
     On a branch of a tree it then dropped  
     The unconscious Prince. After a while he  
 Regained his senses and made an attempt to jump from the tree.  
     To his surprise, the tree started to fly! Like a feather  
     It flew to another hill, and dropped the prince there.  
     How much pain could this man go through!  
     Was this the end? Or was he to endure more?  
     He was tossed from a flying eagle to a flying tree,  
 Now the tree dropped him in a place where he couldn't see  
     Any signs of life! He walked a few steps; then he fell;  
     He got up again and walked down the hill.  
     As he kept walking, he could hear  
     Sound and movement; he thought he reached near  
 A village or a town. But to his amazement, he found that  
     The road led him towards a well-guarded fort.  
     A lake surrounded the fort like a ribbon;  
     The entrance was guarded by a strange looking man.  
     With the body of a tiger and the face of a man  
 The guard stood, motionless, like a statue made of stone.  
     Its long hands looked like huge elephant trunks.  
     The prince was shocked by the appearance  
     Of such an unforeseen creature! He hid behind  
     A bush and watched. Suddenly two tigers came out  
     From the creature's mouth and jumped into the pond.  
     The tigers then mated, and then a woman was born!  
     The tigers then changed their shapes again;  
     This time the two transformed into one man.  
     Seeing such a horrific scene, the prince fled.  
     As he walked under trees, he saw human heads  
     Hanging on trees and laughing at him.  
     Such a fearful scene he had never seen.  
     Trying to escape from that horrible place,  
     Jalal started running through the dark woods  
     When he reached the outskirts of that forest,  
     He was surprised and relieved to see a horse.  
     A golden horse! It quietly stood, as if it was waiting  
     For him. The prince jumped on it, without thinking  
     Of the consequence; and to his utter dismay,  
 It galloped towards the fort from where Jalal was running away!  
     Jalal tried to jump, but he seemed to have no power.  
     The horse reached that lake, and dived into the water!  
     Jalal told himself, "So, this is how I end!"

He closed his eyes. He thought he was drowned  
 And buried under water. But alas! He had yet more to see.  
 He opened his eyes. Where was the lake? Where was he?

He found himself in a gorgeous garden.

Was it real? Or was it his illusion?

Was it that God was trying to ease his final pain  
 With a soothing vision of a delightful garden?

In front of him, he saw an orchard;

He felt an urge to eat a juicy fruit.

He plucked a fruit, but before he took a bite,  
 Ten beautiful women came and carried him inside  
 A stunningly gorgeous mansion. They put him down  
 Before a woman who sat on a glimmering throne.

The pretty woman bowed before her guest;

She wanted to know of him and his quest.

Hungry and tired, the prince was too weak  
 To properly greet her or to politely speak.

Upon her order, her servants brought food

“This must be heaven,” Jalal concluded.

As he ate he looked around him;

He found the beauty of the place quite hypnotizing!

He thought it was the perfect residence

For such pretty and enchanting maidens!

There was a magnetic charm in that place

Jalal was also under its influence.

He was also bewitched by the beauty

Of the woman who owned that place. He

Started to tell her his miserable tale:

From the beautiful land of Shimail

He once traveled to a distant land.

There he saw the prettiest woman,

Who was imprisoned by a ferocious giant.

He took his vow to destroy that fiend.

After much trouble he killed that monster;

He was eager to unite with his lover.

When he killed that ugly ogre,

He thought his miserable days were over.

He thought he would haste back to Rupbanu

To declare that his love for her was true.

Little did he know then that Destiny

Always had an upper hand! When he

Thought he was on his way home,

He arrived at King Zamzam’s realm.

He had no choice but to marry his daughter;

His homeward journey ended in disaster.

To the king’s men he repeatedly confessed

He was not in love with their princess;

Yet, it was just another puzzle of his life:  
 Instead of Rup, Hurbanu became his wife!  
 As he surrendered to his fate, he had this opportunity  
 To unite with his lover, but Destiny  
 Interrupted in the form of a monstrous bird.  
 It snatched him from his ship and dropped  
 Him on a hill; then after endless hours of toil  
 He ran away from the fort. He was brought against his will  
 By a golden horse! The mysterious lady  
 Was impressed by Jalal's life-story.  
 She informed Jalal that she was the queen  
 Of that land; it was she who assigned  
 The bird to kidnap him. The eagle's job  
 Was to bring handsome males for the queen to love!  
 the queen was quite proud of her cunning.  
 With her permission, trees could grow wings.  
 The tree that flew him, the tiger-man, and the mating  
 Of tigers that begot a woman, and the galloping  
 Horse—all were illusions—created by her.  
 She was a lonely queen of a kingdom under water.  
 She constantly needed men to please her.  
 Since the bird had chosen Jalal to be her companion  
 She intended to keep him in her mansion.  
 She would keep Jalal as long as she pleased.  
 She asked him to forget Rup, or his wish to visit  
 Her. Speechless sat the disheartened man.  
 Hours passed; the moon and the stars began  
 To illuminate the dark night; and the joyful queen,  
 Wanted to rest. "But her joys will vanish," says Faizun.

*The Enchantress and her Victim*

Dark night had fallen      and the vile woman,  
    Was aroused with passion  
 She went to the prince and      She lay down  
    On his bed. Then she commanded  
 In an alluring voice      to satisfy her lust.  
    She asked him to make love.  
 Her victim then      refused, saying  
    She should give up the hope.  
 For he would do      no such thing. True  
    He was to his words.  
 The enchantress queen      then began  
    To threaten him. Afterwards,  
 The prince planned      to divert her attention.

He said he was exhausted  
 After the troubles he had to face.  
 In order to serve her, he needed to take some rest.  
 His words pleased the angry enchantress  
 She said she would eagerly wait.  
 She would spend ninety nine days  
 With ninety nine lovers she had  
 In that palace. The hundredth place  
 Of her lover, then he would have.  
 She would return to claim her man  
 And he must be ready to make love.  
 “You have stolen my heart,” the enchantress said,  
 “My handsome ninety nine lovers  
 Have lost the power to arouse desire  
 Oh! My hungry heart now suffers!  
 Yet I will wait. I know that  
 You will be my man!  
 I leave attendants so that they can  
 Look after you when I’m gone.”  
 To her four attendants she said then:  
 “Make sure that my lover  
 Does not flee I want to see  
 Him, when this waiting time is over.”  
 Night departed; the enchantress left  
 While leaving him alone,  
 She teased him by singing  
 For him a love song:

*Her Song:*

My heart I leave with you.  
 Only a cage is my body.  
 O, I carry a cage with me:  
 Refrain: I’ll think of you  
 O, I will think only of you.  
 O, I will wait; I will meditate  
 For you.  
 O, my love, you’ve captured me!  
 Only an empty cage is my body.

*Prince Jalal Planned to Escape*

After singing her song      the enchantress was gone.  
     The prince sadly stayed there.  
 He had no friend.      He didn't find  
 Any chance to escape. One of the four  
 Female attendants      liked the prince, and  
 She loved him since she first saw him.  
 She wished she had      won his heart.  
     She wished she could have him.  
 The clever prince      knew her mind,  
     So he decided to flirt.  
 He asked her to teach      him some magic  
     That would make him smart.  
 The attendant said      if only she had  
     Him as her lover,  
 She would surely      teach him; but she  
     First wanted him to please her.  
 The prince consented.      He thought  
     It as his only chance  
     To escape. So      what harm it'd do  
     If he had to forge a romance!  
 Thus the attendant lady      had her chance. She  
     Enjoyed sensual pleasure.  
     They spend days      and nights together. As  
     Time passed, he had influence over her.  
 So, one day he said,      "O my dearly beloved,  
     Teach me the spell of all spells.  
 I am always yours.      I'll be always here  
     I just want to know how it feels  
 To practice magic.      Those wonderful tricks,  
     I wish I could learn from you.  
 Fear not; I'll not flee.      You have won me.  
     I will always remain true."  
     His words thus      affected her heart,  
     She taught him how to chant  
     A *mantra* and      change his form.  
     And carefully Jalal learnt.  
 The lady then taught      him the magic that  
     Could turn him into a bird.  
     This was the one      that Jalal wanted to learn  
     He made sure that he knew it by heart.  
     Now that he knew      how he would flee  
     He just waited for a chance to escape.  
 On the ninety-eighth day he asked      his attendants  
     To take him to a nearby forest.  
     He said he needed      to soothe his heart;

He needed some seclusion.  
 He knew that the next day he was to please their Lady  
 For that he needed some preparation.  
 He had to appease his mind. He said he would find  
 Peace amidst the peaceful nature.  
 He looked confident; so the attendants  
 Decided to fulfill his desire.  
 Everything was settled; Jalal now waited  
 For his chance to escape from that place.  
 "This time the Almighty will show him pity.  
 He will be saved," Faizunnesa says.

### *Freedom*

With four attending females the prince  
 Wandered in a forest waiting for a chance  
 To trick them and then leave them behind.  
 Those women failed to read his mind.  
 They all walked, and the prince walked fast  
 The moment he saw he had passed  
 The women, he used the spell and changed  
 His shape into a bird. He flew faster than the wind.  
 Before the women noticed his absence,  
 He flew beyond their reach. He flew over mountains,  
 He flew over rivers. He stopped as his wings got sore.  
 Then changing back to his own shape, he looked for  
 Food. He ate fruit and rested for a while.  
 Next morning, he tried to cast back the spell  
 To resume his journey. But to his woe,  
 He failed to remember his *mantra*!  
 What should he do now? What was going on?  
 Why did his fate carry misery along?  
 He fell to the ground and started to cry.  
 Who could save him now? What was the way?

### *Jalal's Complaint*

Lord, the merciful I am such a fool!  
 I thought I could be free!  
 How could I forget the *mantra* that  
 Had the power to save me?  
 I have no power You have control over  
 My life and my soul.  
 You inspire me to rise beyond me

Then you cause me to fall.  
 So many times have I thought I deserved  
     To suffer and die!  
 But then your grace showers and saves  
     Me. I then try  
     To forget my painful past  
 But soon, it becomes clear to me  
 That no matter how much I suffer,  
 It would never be enough for me.  
     O, my love, my dearest Rup,  
 For you I wandered for miles.  
 I still have not held your hand,  
 I still haven't seen you smile.  
     I combated with giants. I had  
     Killed your life long foe.  
 Then I was fated to be married  
     To another woman. But I loved you.  
 My sufferings hence did not end.  
     Even when I thought  
     I was free, by my cruel destiny,  
     To danger's door I was brought.  
 I have no hope to see my love,  
     I will never be with her.  
 I only wish that when I am dead  
     I'll have her with me forever.  
 "Don't lose your hope over your love  
     Don't be so heartbroken.  
 You will receive what you deserve.  
     Be strong," says Faizun.

## BOOK TWO

### *Chapter 1: Battling a Giant*

Prince Jalal lamented for his misfortune. But he was also grateful to the Lord for giving him the opportunity to meet an innocent beauty like Rup. He then prayed for one moment of happiness with his beloved. In return, he promised to bear all the pains and tragic consequences. As he was reflecting on his thoughts, he walked slowly through a pebbled path. He suddenly saw a strange stone on the roadside. He was amazed to see its bright and somewhat unusual stature. He went near and kicked it strongly with his foot. The moment he touched the stone, it seemed that he started a commotion under the earth. Then suddenly the earth broke apart and two enormous giants came up and pulled him down. The giants put him in a dark, dismal prison made out of pebbles and rocks. The prince sat on a rock and remorsefully said, "Dear God, how quickly you listen to your devotee's prayer! You have shown me so much! My forefathers have had no scope to experience what I am going through now. I wish they had. They might have warned me about all these unearthly creatures that share the world with us, and then attack us when we are most vulnerable." Another vicious giant appeared, and to his surprise, the giant spoke to him softly and requested to accompany him. Jalal accompanied the soft-spoken giant to the royal court. He was asked to wait in a corner; from there he could hear the giant asking His Majesty to confirm if they brought in the man he had been waiting to meet. The King stared at the corner where Prince Jalal stood, and signaled him to come forward. Jalal advanced and bowed before the king. Dear reader, don't be surprised to see Prince Jalal standing on his own feet with such a calm composure! The truth is, he was so exhausted and he had suffered so much that he lost his mental strength to be frightened any more. Or, maybe he was engrossed in his beloved's thought so deeply that it mattered nothing to him if he saw a giant or a ghost in front of him.

His Majesty, the giant, told his court that the man who stood there was not a simple human. He then addressed Jalal, "Tell me stranger, where is your kingdom? You must be a Prince. Why are you traveling like this?" Prince Jalal replied with respect,

"Your Majesty has guessed the truth. I am a prince. My life is but a tragic tale. The intensity of my pain is impossible for me to describe

in words. I will try only to give your majesty some idea. My father was the king of a land called Shimail. After his death, my mother ruled the kingdom. She devoted her time between the country and me. She provided for me the best education a prince can possibly have. She brought wise pundits from far and near to teach me. I was well educated; a little spoiled too! I got whatever I wanted. The only thing I failed to get was a perfect bride. My Queen Mother did her best to find a suitable bride for me, but all her efforts went in vain. Then I decided to take matter into my own hands. Your Majesty, that started my misfortune. I was a grown man and became impatient to enjoy the prime time of my youth. So, I left my mother and went in search of a bride. During my youthful venture, I accidentally reached a garden and saw a pretty young lady; that was my first experience of falling in love. It was love at first sight. I corresponded with the lady after much trouble and came to know that she was but a prisoner in her own home. I was to free her from the hands of a giant named Fortas who intended to marry her when she grew old enough to be married. I set out then in search of her captor. On my way, I was captured by a fairy princess. I fled from there and eventually destroyed the giant. But my miseries had no end. As I was planning to go back to my love, I became a prisoner of a king named Zamzam. I had to marry his daughter to be free from his captivity. Then came another danger; I was kidnapped by a flying eagle that belonged to an enchantress of a land under a lake. She wanted to keep me as her lover. I eventually escaped from there with the help of a female attendant. From there I came to this land, where my curiosity caused me to uplift a strange looking pebble that opened the gate of this kingdom under earth.”

The narratives of his bravery impressed the king of the giants. He requested Jalal to take his place beside him praising him for his courage and wisdom. He knew only a true prince could encounter and survive such dangers.

### *Chapter 2: The Tale of King Aardbel*

Aardbel, the King of under-earth giants had his own story to tell. But before he started, he asked the prince to promise to save him from the danger he was in. Prince Jalal remarked that being a king of powerful giants, His Majesty was capable of helping a powerless man to achieve his goal. So he promised to help only if the King of giants agreed to

help him reach his beloved. They then mutually agreed to assist each other; the old monarch addressed Jalal as his son and agreed to help him just the way he would help his own son. Jalal paid due respect to an elderly man and requested him to begin his tale. The old man then narrated the following story:

Dear human, as I have already accepted you as my son, I will not hide anything from you. A long time ago, when I was young, I was flying over the palace of the Persian King. As I was flying leisurely enjoying the beauty of the royal garden, I caught a glimpse of a beautiful maiden. I flew closer to the palace and recognized that maiden as the princess of that land. The Princess of Persia was taking her evening walk then. The moment I saw her, my heart pounded like a wild beast and I felt a gust of passionate desire taking control over my willpower. I instantly flew down and snatched her away from that palace. So, I abducted her and brought her here to make her my wife. I also fathered her child, our only child. We had a handsome son. He inherited his mother's charm and his father's strength. In short, he grew up to be the strongest good looking man one could ever imagine. We named him Digvijay.<sup>58</sup> By the time he was fifteen, he excelled in warfare. No one could defeat him in fencing, or in any game of warfare for that matter. He became an invincible warrior. For his good looks, we used to call him a charmer. As he grew to be a warrior, we realized that we did give him a well deserving name; I knew that one day he would really be a great conqueror.

Once, when he was fourteen, Digvijay wished to travel on air and asked my permission to use the royal chariot. I ordered the charioteer to prepare his chariot properly. My prince rode the chariot with his attendants. A few days later, the charioteer came to me and wished to speak to me in private. He then told me that the prince no longer wished to have company when he traveled. Now that I recall, that poor man was really trying to inform me about the young prince's lifestyle. But I was a blind father; I rebuked that man for trying to refute my only heir's order. Since then, my son rode the chariot all by himself. I even overlooked the fact that a young man who just attained his physical growth, only wanted to travel alone during late nights. He would wander at night and come back at dawn. I hardly had time to

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<sup>58</sup> Digvijay is a Bengali word for "victorious." The name is also used as an epithet to acknowledge the invincible strength of the Prince.

meet him, for when he slept, I had to do my royal duties. When I had time for him, he would be out riding the chariot. Three or four years went by, and one day, when I was having a conference with my counselors, a dashing youth came to see me. It took me a few minutes before I realized that it was my own son that I was looking at! He was a grown man; most of all, he was a dangerously attractive young man!

That night I sought advice from my queen. I told her that I wanted my seventeen year old son to be married. I told her how I was surprised to see him that day. I wanted her approval on my decision. My queen smiled, and she sweetly said, "My lord, who am I to question your decision? I have seen you before I have seen the face of any other man besides my father. You are the only man I have been with. I am to care for you and accept your decisions. You are my protector and counselor; why should I disagree, especially when you are taking a timely decision? The only thing I can say is that he should have a human-female as his wife. He is born from a human's womb. He might not find a female of your species attractive enough to be his wife." I agreed with my wife's view and decided to send my messengers across the world in search of a suitable human bride for my son.

My giant envoys went to various parts of the world and all came back empty handed. Just we were all about to give up our search, the last messenger came back with good news. He had been to the land of Tartar where he found the prettiest of all women. He described her gorgeous palace, her stunning attire, and her dazzling beauty. I decided to verify his description. So, that night I flew to the land of Tartar and found out that what my messenger said was not true enough. In fact, her beauty disabled the expressive power of any language. She was so incredibly pretty that I was tempted to kidnap her for my son right away. Then I reasoned with myself and decided to follow the proper procedures for a royal wedding before abducting her. The next morning I called my son at the court, and told him about the discovery. To my disappointment, my young son refused to marry. He even refused to clarify his reason. I was heartbroken. I then consulted with my queen, who sent for her son and had a private conversation with him. She ordered him not to defy his father. Again the prince politely refused his mother; this time he warned that a marriage might result in his death. We, the two heartbroken parents, sat quietly, trying to figure out the possible meaning of his words.

Now, what was that the charioteer wanted to tell me years ago? Why didn't I give him a chance to talk? I decided to send for that old man

that night. “What did you try to tell me years ago? What was it?” I asked.

“Your Majesty, I lack the heart to speak before you about that,” replied the old man.

“Where is the prince now?”

“I fear to answer that.”

“Speak. Have no fear.”

“The prince has gone somewhere, on his own.”

“What gave you the courage not to do your duty as a charioteer?”

“Your Highness, that was what I wanted to tell you last time. I can speak if you spare me your anger.”

I promised not to punish him, and then he told me a horrible story. Remember, when I said that I allowed my son to ride the royal chariot when he was fourteen years old? That decision was the cause of my misfortune. The old charioteer told me that once they were faring in the sky and came in contact with another sky rider. A beautiful woman was in that other chariot. It was covered with curtains but the lady lifted one corner of the curtain to enjoy the outside view. As soon as the prince saw the beautiful face, he reacted as if he was struck by lightning and fell unconscious. The old charioteer and others tended him, and asked him what caused the incident. The young prince told them that he was in love and he would not live without that woman. The old charioteer warned him: “Dear Prince, you are very young. What you are experiencing is not love. It is but a physical sensation. It is a bodily urge. It will pass. It is aroused by your carnal desire for pleasure, and if you fail to reason with your desire, there will be no difference between you and an animal. This is only *kama*, my Prince; man is great when he governs his *kama* instead of being governed by it.” Paying no attention to the old charioteer’s advice, Prince Digvijay ordered him to inquire about the mysterious lady. The old charioteer then followed the other chariot and landed where it stopped to rest. He then went to speak with one of the female attendants of that chariot. From her, he found out that the lady was the daughter of King Shamsher of Gandharba. Her name was Mahemanir. While the old charioteer was speaking with the attendant, the young prince approached them. He pleaded the servant to allow him to speak with her mistress. The young prince promised to take his own life if Princess Mahemanir left without speaking to him. The attendant was in trouble. She tried to reason with the young prince of the giants by saying, “Our mistress is so young and a virgin; if our king finds out about this, he will surely kill us including

his daughter and you.” But nothing seemed to calm him down. First he was stubborn. Then he began to weep like a child. Seeing him suffer, the attendant went to reveal to her Princess how a stranger is inflicted with love; she came back quickly with a proposition from her mistress. She said that the princess agreed to meet the young man on the condition that the prince of the giants would never marry another woman once his desire is fulfilled. He would belong to Mahemanir forever, and he would die if he ever married anyone else. This was a tough choice, the attendant warned him by saying, “love is a rare treasure and it is difficult to achieve it or keep it. One may have to die to keep love’s honor. Most of all, a pledge towards love is its driving power. One should pledge allegiance to love. Separation and distance from each other may kill love; so, victorious is he who can control his *kama*, and constantly reflect on his lover.” Even such harsh words could not weaken Digvijay’s defiant wish. The young prince agreed to abide by the rules of love. The old charioteer tried to prevent him from taking such a vow. He reminded the young prince that he had duty towards his parents and towards the kingdom which he would rule one day. He told the prince not to take such a hasty decision; after all, he had his whole life ahead to enjoy women more prettier than this one. But his words made the prince angry. The next day, he went without taking the charioteer.

This was what the old charioteer told me. I went to the royal suite where my anxious queen was waiting. “Is this why we raise children?” I asked my queen, “Are they born to make us suffer? I do not believe in any superstitions. I will marry him with a girl of my own choice, and I will see what curse it brings forth.” The queen heard all but said nothing. I called Prince Digvijay the next morning at my court and told him, “As our only son, you are obliged to obey us; as a prince, you are obliged to the kingdom to marry a suitable princess so that you can beget a perfect heir to the throne. As a future king, you are obliged to the citizens of your land to set good examples of family and social values. Do you want to perform your duties? Or do you want to admit to this court that you are a failure?”

Sadly my son replied, “I know I can not disobey my father. Do as you like. I just want to remind you that because you love me, you will suffer the most when I am married.” Saying this, he left the court. All my courtiers followed him to his quarter. Prince Digvijay admitted to the chief of my noble courtiers that he believed his death was imminent. That wise man came back and requested me to reconsider my decision.

But I was adamant to have my son married. I took the death warning as his attempt to divert me from my concern for his marriage. I decided to advance with my plan; I flew one night to that land of Tartar and stole the Princess from the palace. I placed the bride-to-be at my queen's care, and ordered people to begin the nuptial ceremony. Preparations were made. After the wedding feast, all guests left. I was proud and happy to have accomplished my fatherly duty. I went to my palace at night to find my son and his new bride sleeping in different rooms. As I inquired, my queen replied that our son believed a night with his wife would only hasten his death. I was blind with anger to find her so vulnerable to her son's mischief. "Don't you know, Darling," I said, "that to a man who is in love, the smile of his ugly beloved seems prettier than the prettiest of all smiles? It is nothing but love. Only a lover can thus neglect a wife and waste away his wedding night thinking about another woman he loves. Disregard his illusion; ignore his superstition."

I then raged against my son. "Ungrateful, disobedient son!" I said, "You are neglecting your duty as a husband. Now go, and prove to your wife that you are a man!" My son wept and went to his bride; I laughed the laugh of a winner and proudly walked to my queen's chamber.

This was how I sent my own son to his death bed and slept peacefully! My queen did not sleep. She sat, motionless, and cried when I asked her to take some rest. "You may have ruined my son," she cried, and then ran towards the room where slept her son with his new bride. I loathe myself now when I recall how conceited I was that night! I rested the whole night and slept peacefully until a sudden shrill disturbed my peace. I woke up, and recognizing the screaming voice to be my queen's, ran where it was coming from. She was in my son's room. Oh! what did I see! My queen sat holding her only son on her lap. He was dead, or so it seemed. I ran to hold my flesh and blood; I wanted to feel the warmth of life in his wasting body. But his mother, my queen, suddenly turned ferocious and rebuked me in harshly. She lost her poise and screamed at me, blaming me for my stubbornness; she held me responsible for her son's death. She cursed me for pushing her only child towards death. She recalled how her poor son resisted the marriage, and how I commanded him to do what he knew he should not do. And I took all her words silently, for I knew she was right. I overlooked one problem and tried to cover up my irresponsibility with stubbornness. It was I who allowed a juvenile boy to have free-

dom at an early age. It was my decision to get him married. I blamed myself as much as my queen did.

But I was too stubborn to give up. I sent for the shaman giant, who arrived shortly and detected signs of life in the seemingly dead body of our prince, “He is not dead,” the shaman said, “but it is worse than death; he is in a comma. He would never wake up; the only remedy is a sip of water from the fountain of immortality.”

“The Immortality Fountain!” I exclaimed, “Doesn’t that belong in King Shamsher’s garden?”

No one answered me; we all realized that the curse came true! It was King Shamsher’s daughter whose curse fell on the prince for breaking his promise.

The shaman’s words somehow relieved me because I knew I could fly and get some water from that well very easily. But that could never be, the shaman informed me. Only one person could get the water of immortality for my prince, and that person was not me. He told me that the only man who could bring back water to cure my love-cursed son was a lover who left his land in search of his own beloved; this man was a brave son of a respectable king, a human who had the strongest of hearts. Dear Prince Jalal, my shaman said you were the man. We knew that you were coming this way. So, I had to capture you like this for that purpose. Now that you have heard the miserable tale of a tormented father, please help me. I have called you my son; now do your duty by making a miserable father happy.

Prince Jalal was touched by King Aardbel’s sad story. He decided to help this miserable father. The next morning he started for the land of King Shamsher. King Aardbel appointed a giant for Jalal’s service. The giant carried Jalal in his shoulders and flew like a bird to their destination.

### *Chapter 3: In the Land of the Glendoveers*

Prince Jalal rode on the back of a giant in search of King Shamsher’s land. One night, as the giant was flying, Jalal heard a wailing sound coming from a fortress down below. He asked the giant to stop over the fortress. As they went near, they could distinctly hear a woman crying for help. Prince Jalal commanded his carrier to place him inside the room from where the sound was coming. Inside the room, Jalal saw a beautiful woman, who was constantly wailing for a lover. Prince Jalal

approached her with the intention of helping her and asked her the cause of her distress. The wailing woman greeted this stranger with tears, and then unfolded the story of her suffering:

“Hear me, stranger. You will know how I feel, for I believe you yourself must have felt the same for your beloved. I believe you are also pining for love. Otherwise, you would not have responded to my plea for help. My name is Shudhanshubadani;<sup>59</sup> I am born out of a monster and an elf. My father, a monster king, abducted my mother from her kingdom and made her his second wife. My stepmother and my stepbrother were always trying to harm me and my mother. They were jealous because our father loved me more than he loved his older son. My mother passed away when I was five. I was raised by a nurse since then. A few years ago, while I was wandering near a canyon, I met a handsome male. This man approached my nurse and wanted to know about me. From a distance I heard my nurse having a long conversation with that stranger. He gave me a passionate glance; my heart melted. When he left that place, I asked my nurse about him. “He is a Glendoveer, a prince, named Shah Bakht,” my nurse continued, “But he was raised by giants. The giants found him in a forest and took him under their care. His foster parents have decided to marry him to a woman of their species, but he does not want to marry her. He is only fifteen and he does not wish to live his life with a she-monster. Now, he has fallen in love with you, and wants to marry you. I told him to see your father and ask for your hand in marriage.” My nurse’s words filled my heart with joy. I eagerly waited for my father’s response.

That young man went to meet my father at his court, and he politely begged for one special wish. My father promised to give him anything he wanted, but made sure that it was not his throne that this stranger wanted! My father was a man of his word and he would keep any promise he made no matter how hard it would be for him to keep it. Anyway, the stranger wished to have the king’s daughter as his bride. My father was speechless. He had to do what he promised; but he wanted to know first about the stranger’s lineage. Shah Bakht then told my father how he fled from his home at eight and how the monsters raised him as their own child. Now that he wanted to reunite with his birth parents, he did not want his foster parents to find out his intention to marry a woman of his own choice. The monsters would harm him

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<sup>59</sup> A Bengali compound word that means ‘a woman whose face is bright or shaped like a full moon.’

and his intended bride. My father decided to keep his secret to himself, but told him to return the following year for the wedding; he was too young to marry; besides, my father had some other tasks to finish before my wedding. My father only told his state secretary that I was betrothed to this young man, a son of a monster named Sartan.

My father died before he could fulfill his promise. After his death, my stepbrother ascended the throne, and he refused to marry me with a male of a lower monster clan. When Shah Bakht returned the following year, my brother imprisoned him in a dungeon. He also kept me in this fort so that I cannot have any communication with Shah Bakht. I beg you, dear stranger, save me from this misery. Consider me your sister and do what you can to make your own sister happy. Please, help me.”

Prince Jalal promised to rescue Shah Bakht and save her from distress.

#### *Chapter 4: Rescuing the Glendoveer Prince*

Prince Jalal began his search for Shah Bakht. He wandered through forests and reached a dark spot where he saw a sage meditating under a big bunyan tree. The sage must have been meditating for countless years; trees grew around his body and termites built their mounds on him. Prince Jalal prostrated before this sage and prayed for his blessing. The sage opened his eyes and gazed at him for a moment. Then he gravely warned Jalal, “The task you now have taken is very difficult. It will take a lot of courage and patience. But then, a good life is always difficult to lead. You can always drown in the ocean of carnal desire. You can easily be an animal, always searching for his mate; or, you can choose the other difficult way to live a meaningful life, to live to help others achieve their dreams. I see wisdom in your eyes. You are a wise wanderer. You will succeed if only you can resist temptations of the world. You do yourself good by helping others.”

The astute sage then endowed Jalal with some magical power. First, he gave Jalal five magical arrows with which he could kill thousands of enemies. Then he taught him one *mantra* with which Jalal would be able to give life to his arrows and destroy his opponents. He also taught Jalal a second *mantra* that would save him from the faces of dangers. Prince Jalal paid his tribute to this sage and left for his destination.

The next morning, he walked until the horizon asked the light-giver to give the little moon a chance to shine her beam. At the end of the

day's journey, he reached the shore of a fathomless sea. He had no means of crossing it; so he sat by the shore for hours. At last, he spotted a boatman slowly rowing away his boat. The boatman responded to Jalal's call and came ashore. The moment Jalal got on board, the boat sank, and once more Jalal had the experience of waking up in a Kingdom under water. He found himself lying under a huge tree with various animals hanging from it like its branches. What was more shocking, the animals could talk! They all complained to Jalal how they were transformed into animal branches of a huge tree by an evil magician. No sooner had they spoken than a ferocious creature advanced on horseback. It shot an arrow at Prince Jalal. Jalal shot two of his magical arrows. The moment he shot them, a thunder storm broke; lightning struck the ground. Jalal became afraid; he closed his eyes and started reciting the two *mantras*. After a long while, Jalal opened his eyes only to find that the sky was pouring snakes of different shapes, colors, and sizes at his enemy! Along with the snake lightning, came stone-rain, but nothing harmed Jalal. He was saved by the *mantra* from all dangers. Jalal began to walk forward. He realized that this was the place where Shah Bakht was kept as a prisoner. He began searching for a secret dungeon. As he was walking, he found an oval shaped room. Thinking that this was the prison, he entered the room; in utter amazement, he observed that the room became alive and ran towards the dark water. First it floated, then it sank again, and then it stopped abruptly ejecting Jalal from its 'body.' Jalal found himself in a wonderful garden. "This time it must be paradise," he told himself, "I must have died, and because I've suffered so much on earth, God must have rewarded me by putting me here."

But who would scream for help in paradise? He could hear collective male voices coming from a dark area. As he advanced, he saw a huge building. People were screaming in that building. As he drew near, he could clearly hear them asking him to be away from that cursed building. Prince Jalal stood at the door and peeked in. He could see seven men confined in that room.

### *Chapter 5: The Tale of Seven Brothers*

The seven imprisoned men were happy to hear Jalal's voice. They thought the Lord had sent him for their rescue. Upon Jalal's inquiry, the eldest of the brothers started narrating their tragic tale:

We are the sons of King Rayhan of Sirajnagar. We were seven happy princes until our mother died and our father brought in a stepmother to torture us. Our father paid more attention to our stepmother and our stepsister than he did to us. Our stepmother was a cruel hearted, vicious woman who tried to hurt us in many ways. She asked her chief attendant to pollute our hearts with ill thoughts. One day, this attendant told me to claim the throne before my father became weak and old. I did not pay attention to her words because I knew she was acting for my evil stepmother.

“May I interfere here?” asked Prince Jalal, “I do not consider it princely to speak ill of a King’s wife; besides, she must be of noble birth, and you should not disrespect her family by speaking ill of her.”

I apologize, dear stranger, for painting a wrong picture with my words, said the eldest of the seven brothers, but if you hear about her origin, you will definitely agree with me that a woman of lower birth can never erase her lowly nature. After my mother’s death, my father lost interest in his royal duties. He once left his kingdom to travel through cities in disguise. During his journey, he and his companions once stopped at a small shop in the city of Samarkand to buy some food. He was very thirsty and he requested the shop owner to give him some drinking water. “You seem to be a man of a respectable Muslim family,”<sup>60</sup> the shop owner said, “How can you drink water at a Hindu’s place?” “I don’t mind eating at your house either,” replied my father. The man then offered my father and his group some homemade sweet pastries, yogurt, puffed rice and many other delicious items. My father and his friends were starving; so they sat down and ate. As my father was eating, he noticed that the bamboo thatched partition that separated that room from the next one was damaged in some places, and he could see a pretty girl’s eyes looking at him through the tattered wall. My father felt restless. In fact he became so restless that he could not eat any more. He was feeling hot; sweat broke on his forehead. He complained to his companions that he was feeling dizzy. Men tried to comfort him by fanning him and by sprinkling rosewater on his head. After a while, my father asked the shop owner about his family and

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<sup>60</sup> This is the only time when Faizunnesa refers to the religious background of her characters here. In this conversation, we become aware of the communal prejudice of her Muslim characters as Jalal identifies himself as a Muslim and slights people of lower caste.

came to know that the man, Chandra Kanta, belonged to the Baisha<sup>61</sup> caste; my father also came to know that he had only one ten year old daughter, and that he had not given his daughter into marriage yet. Saying nothing to Chandra Kanta or to his own companions, my father came back to his kingdom. Then he sent a letter to the King of Samarkand requesting to send him Chandra Kanta's daughter as a prospective bride. The King of Samarqand ordered Chandra Kanta to do accordingly, but Chandra Kanta politely refused to obey an order that would make him an outcast in his own community. The king of that country became furious at the disobedience of his subject. Chandra Kanta however gave in and decided to take his daughter to Sirajnagar. So one day, Chandra Kanta showed up in our kingdom and brought a good looking boy with him. I was the one who saw them first at the palace gate. I was the one who reported to our father about a stranger who brought a good looking boy and wanted to see the King only. My father almost ran to greet the stranger and, after the stranger left that night, my father spent his time in his quarter where he kept that boy. Later in the morning, he ordered his state secretary to arrange for a wedding ceremony. My father then married that boy who was none other than Chandra Kanta's daughter brought in to the palace in disguise. Now, tell me dear prince, was I wrong to speak ill of a woman who belonged to a lower caste?

"No," replied Jalal, "You cannot grow sweet fruit out of a low grade tree even if you soak its root with juice extracted from sugarcane. A crow can never sing like a cuckoo; similarly, money does not make a man of lower class an aristocrat, and a noble man does not lose his class even when he is a beggar. I understand your point; now, continue with your story."

As I was saying, my stepmother's chief attendant kept on trying to provoke me to challenge my father's authority. But I did not fall in her trap; however, one day when she came and told me that our stepmother wanted to see all of us, my heart was changed. I thought that our stepmother might have changed her attitude and wanted to repent for her past behavior. We all went to see our stepmother and were surprised to have such a hearty welcome. She fed us, talked sweetly with us, and then finally said that she wanted a favor from us: she wanted me to claim the throne so that our old father could rest and

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<sup>61</sup> A lower caste Hindu.

live a peaceful life. After all, wasn't he too old to do all those tiring kingly duties when he had seven grown up sons? She advised us to consult with his ministers regarding this. We agreed to obey her advice. That same night, she sadly told our father that she had heard a rumor that his seven sons might try to usurp the old king. She added that she was concerned about his safety and would rather live a life of a beggar with him than stay in a palace full of enemies. My father could not believe her. So she called for her chief attendant who also admitted to having heard the rumor. Our father said nothing. The next morning he called all his courtiers for a meeting and discussed what he had heard from his queen. One of his noble men informed the king that he was approached by one of the princes the previous day. That man assured our father that indeed that rumor was true: we were making such a plan to overthrow our father! The king became so angry that he ordered for our execution. Our stepmother's female servant informed us of his decision and advised us to flee the country, which we did.

Thus we seven wretched princes left the kingdom as if to fulfill our stepmother's wish. As we walked through a dark forest, we came near a stone mansion and heard a female voice asking passing travelers to stop and rescue her. That was what we also tried to do and reached a place near a lake where an ugly monster grabbed the seven of us and imprisoned us in this deserted mansion.

"I have met that wailing woman" Jalal said, "in fact, I was on my way to find out her beloved, the Glendoveer Prince. Do you have any idea where I can find him?" The seven brothers answered in the negative. Prince Jalal then decided to move forward in search of Shah Bakht, leaving the brothers where they were.

### *Chapter 6: The Rescue*

Prince Jalal thus resumed his search and reached another mansion. He started searching every room and found a handsome prince sleeping in one of the rooms. That room was guarded by an animal that had a body of a lion, paws of a tiger and head of an elephant. The moment Jalal went near, this strange animal tried to attack him. Jalal used his magical arrow to kill the creature. He also uttered his *mantra* to cast a spell. The sky turned black and untimely darkness of night enveloped the whole earth. Prince Jalal closed his eyes in awe. The sound and the fury were deafening his ears, but still he kept his eyes closed. After

a few moments, the noise subsided, and as Jalal opened his eyes, he saw the mansion had vanished and he found himself standing in an open field surrounded by hundreds of men. He saw the seven princes among those men. They came forward and expressed their gratitude for making them free. They were all amazed to see a simple man break the spell of the most powerful magician. The sleeping prince woke up and expressed his gratitude. He introduced himself as Shah Bakht, the Glendoveer prince. He requested Jalal to help him rescue his lover. The seven princes of Sirajnagar expressed their gratitude and wanted to accompany Jalal in his task.

Thus, accompanied by the seven brothers and the Glendoveer prince, Jalal resumed his rescue mission. But they did not have to go confront any dangers any more. Jalal recited his *mantra* and wished freedom for Princess Shudhanshubadani, and from her confined room the princess felt a powerful aura around her. She saw her prison cell vanishing in thin air; her shackles melted away like dew drops, and her limbs felt relaxed. Suddenly she found herself sitting on cold spot with no bars around her; as the cold and refreshing air touched her skin, she felt frightened and lost her consciousness. Jalal's giant gently picked the unconscious woman and flew her away from there. When she woke up, she found herself under a tree, surrounded by strangers; she could recognize Jalal, who was also a part of that crowd; the next face she recognized was that of Shah Bakht, the man of her dream! Princess Shudhanshubadani felt the power of love that he was generating through his anxious eyes! Now that Princess Shudhanshubadani had found her lover, Jalal felt that his duty here was done. But the woman said that she was not safe from her stepbrother, the then king of her country. Her stepbrother would never let her marry a man below her class. She requested Prince Jalal to resolve her problem once and for all so that she could live a happy life with the man of her choice. The benevolent Prince of Shimail made up his mind to ensure peace for this suffering woman who claimed from him the duties of a brother. He accepted the bondage of her sisterly affection and concern. The Glendoveer prince and the seven princes of Sirajnagar pledged allegiance to Jalal's comradeship. Now they had to either combat or correspond with King Kalkum, the stepbrother who did not want to fulfill the promise his father had made to Prince Shah Bakht.

However, it would be very hard for Prince Jalal to practice diplomacy with a king who had magical power and was supported by the enchanters of a dark world. Besides, he already had expressed his opin-

ion regarding his stepsister and her lover by keeping them in captivity for years. A battle thus remained to be the only solution for which Jalal was not well equipped. Princess Shudhanshubadani remembered that she still had a key to a secret locker where her grandfather kept his most powerful magical weapons: one was a cloak that made a person invisible, the other was an all powerful sword, and the third one was a foot-long rope that could tie a thousand hands easily. She decided to go back to the palace at night to retrieve those magical items for Jalal, in case he needed them. So, she flew to the palace at night, sneaked into the room where that locker was, and brought back the three magical items for Jalal. She also brought new information: her brother knew that a strange prince's powerful intervention had destroyed his magical prowess over his stepsister and her beloved. He also knew that Prince Shah Bakht of the Glendoveers and the seven princes of Sirajnagar were grouped with that stranger; now he had gathered his own soldiers to start a battle against his opponents.

#### *Chapter 7: Battle with the Giants*

Shah Bakht, the seven princes of Sirajnagar, and the giant who accompanied Jalal from King Aardbel's land, were all prepared for the battle. But Jalal decided to take his carrier, the giant, and confront Prince Kalkum, alone. So, all the rest of the men stayed in a secret hiding place as Jalal flew on the back of the giant. They reached the capital and the giant began to walk slowly on the ground carrying Prince Jalal on his back. Ogresses and she-monsters crowded around this giant who carried a handsome man on his back. Prince Jalal's physical charm dazzled their eyes. They ran towards the giant and asked him about the man who was an epitome of manly charm and youth; they wanted to keep the man for their own pleasure and offered the giant generous gifts in return. The giant did not respond to their inquiries, but the females did not give up. They followed the giant and cursed their own husbands for being ugly, old, crooked or cold. They voiced their intentions to kill their ugly husbands if they could have this handsome human as their sexual partner. Jalal looked closely around him and felt as if he was surrounded by living, breathing mass of colossal clouds! How ugly were their features! Words themselves would become dumb if they were to describe the beauty of these monstrous females. Their ugliness could be surmised briefly in the following way:

Some were buffalo-heads with huge horns  
 Their necks were long, like a gigantic horse.  
 Monkey faced were some, while some had owl's eyes.  
 Ears hang like warthog's teeth; storms were their breaths.  
 Their lips looked like split bananas. Their bodies were  
 Covered all over with rope-thick hair;  
 As they walked, those hair ropes dangled in the ground!  
 Their navels were like big and muddy ponds!  
 Those Gorges centered the mountainous mounds  
 Of Their filthy and fleshy abdomens.  
 The young ones carried heaps of mountainous breasts,  
 While others had stooping bosoms on their crocodile chests,  
 And some had udders of a cow. What more to say of their gait?  
 Their baboon-buttocks were supported by two, huge leg posts,  
 And their breath! oh! All the perfumes of Mother earth  
 Would turn repellent, if tainted by their rotten breath.  
 And yet, they considered themselves appealing.  
 God had filled this earth with His creations.  
 And all are blind as they could not detect  
 Their own faults. "If all could indeed  
 Face their ugliness, and accept and amend,  
 The world could be a better place," Faizun comments.

Prince Jalal looked at the moving clouds around him and thought the Lord's power was really incomprehensible. It was a wonder how God could create so many different shapes and features and induce in each of his creations such a spirit of self glorification that each creature considers itself an epitome of beauty! God has given all beings this power of denial and blindness in times of self judgment. Else, how could these females, who had no reason to be proud of their own physical features, blame their husbands for being ugly? Did they ever see their own reflections in a mirror or in water? He was amused to see these creatures, and addressed them gleefully: "Dear pretty ladies, I wonder how your lovers can resist you. It must be quite impossible. Even I have trouble resisting you! Yet, I have to go as I am in a hurry; I wish I could stay and enjoy your company."

The she-monsters stood still as the handsome man left on a giant's back; they were not sure which one of them the human was addressing. Each thought she was his center of attention. But before they broke into a fight over his comment, they decided to ask him directly. So after a while, they followed the human again and asked him to clarify his comment. Prince Jalal took some time and then told them he considered all of them equally beautiful. The horribly ugly female monsters

stood still again as Prince Jalal's giant disappeared from the scene. As the giant reached King Kalkum's palace, Jalal suggested they should become invisible before entering the palace; the giant used his spell to become invisible while Jalal covered himself with the cloak that princess Shudhanshubadani had given him. They became invisible and entered without being noticed by the guards. They found Shudhanshubadani's stepbrother at his court, discussing possible strategies for the battle. At one point, Jalal heard that they decided to capture Shudhanshubadani and her well-wishers and kill all of them in front of Jalal. Since that benevolent prince risked his life to save people, he would die in despair. So, they decided to punish Jalal through mentally torture. As he heard this plan, Jalal spoke without being seen: "I haven't done any harm to any of you. My crime is that I save the distressed and fight the oppressors. I serve innocents; if helping the innocents is a crime, then I will commit that crime all my life and bear the consequences. These two young lovers have suffered so much. You can do some good by making their wedding arrangements." King Kalkum became angry, hearing Jalal's voice; he challenged the invisible speaker to come up front and act like a brave human.

Jalal removed his cloak, and the whole court sat dumbfounded. The male ogres in that court had not seen such a handsome male in their lives. Strangely enough, they felt a sudden affection for this stunningly handsome man. Only King Kalkum was indifferent, simply because rage blinded his eyes. So, he roared, "Imprudent human! How dare you come into the royal court of a monster king and insult him with your puny words of benevolence? Don't you know I could smash your skull with one knuckle?" The king looked at Jalal's attendant and retorted at him, "How can a powerful giant like you degrade your species by taking orders from a fragile man?" He ordered his guards to attack Jalal, but no one stirred; they were all mesmerized by Jalal's appearance. No one wanted to hurt this creature of perfection. They felt helpless; after all, they were but the servants of a king and they had to do what their ruler ordered him. "Oh! how sweet is liberty!" They thought, "Without it none has the right to do be happy. One has to serve the controlling authority against one's will. Only those who are not free will know our pain." Thus the guards advanced unwillingly to capture Jalal. But Jalal took out his sword and began to fight. Jalal and his giant disciple killed many of their enemies. He tied hundreds of his enemies with his foot-long rope and chopped off their heads with one blow. Jalal defeated his enemies easily and captured King Kalkum and

his royal courtiers and tied them down with his magical rope. He did not kill them though; instead, he urged the King to perform his duty as a guardian of his stepsister. “When a girl child is born,” he said, “It is our duty to raise her properly and hand her over to a suitable husband. Brothers and father of a marriageable girl cannot find rest and mental peace until they find a husband for her. They suffer even more if she grows too old. You are the male guardian of your stepsister. Instead of marrying her to a prince, you have kept her in captivity. She has crossed her adolescence and has grown into a young woman because of your stubbornness. Before it is too late, you should hand her over to a good husband and relieve yourself of the brotherly duty.”

His long speech had an impact on the King. But he did not intend to marry his sister to a monster of low birth. To this, Prince Jalal replied that the man his sister loved was in fact of noble birth: he was the son of a demigod, raised by monsters. King Kalkum had no more objections to his sister’s marriage. He agreed to arrange for the wedding ceremony; a truce was thus made and the wedding took place.

Prince Jalal spent some time with the newlyweds and their family. After a while, he decided to take leave in order to finish another task: reinstatement of the seven princes of Sirajnagar in their royal positions. Prince Shah Bakht gave Jalal a precious ring that had the power to defy fatality. Jalal would not die as long as he had that ring. Prince Jalal accepted the gift and left that land along with the seven princes. They grabbed the giant’s locks of hair as it flew them to their destination. As they reached Sirajnagar, the brothers found out that their father was dead and their stepsister was married to King Kaiser’s son.

### *Chapter 8: King Kaiser’s Tale*

King Kaiser was the ruler of Jangbad  
 A charitable king was he.  
 People from far and near came to King Kaiser  
 And they praised him for his generosity.  
 Now, in a neighboring land, lived a spiteful king, and  
 Shatabhuja was his name.  
 When he heard about King Kaiser’s deeds  
 He became jealous of that fame.  
 Shatabhuja always followed evil ways  
 He lived to harm good men.  
 Now that King Kaiser was known far and near  
 Shatabhuja’s malice targeted him.

No one, he said,       should have the heart  
                                 To overshadow his reputation.  
 None should supersede    his charity or aid,  
                                 Or make him mad with frustration.  
 Kaiser had done       that, and there was none  
                                 Who could save King Kaiser now  
 From his anger.       To destroy Kaiser  
                                 He then took a vow.  
 Kaiser the king       lacked one thing,  
                                 He lacked a fighting spirit.  
 Charitable though he was   he had no courage  
                                 To battle, kill, or defeat.  
 As Shatabhuja's soldiers   approached near  
                                 Kaiser sent his messenger,  
                                 He wrote a letter   to King Shatabhuja  
                                 And asked him to withdraw his soldiers.  
 He had done no harm,   Kaiser wrote him  
                                 And there was no reason to fight.  
                                 But this was just   the ways of this world;  
                                 The evil apparently would win.  
 "Kaiser had no choice;   his destiny was  
                                 To fight his foe," says Faizun.

King Kaiser ordered his troops to march forward and encounter enemies at the war front; he stayed behind to observe the battle. King Kaiser's warriors fought their best but could not win the battle. Realizing that his destruction was imminent, King Kaiser fled to the dark forest, taking his only son along with him. He then came to Sirajnagar and requested for King Rayhan's help to regain his kingdom from an intruder. King Rayhan treated Kaiser with respect. Kaiser's son, Chit-tahar received proper attention as a prince. The following morning, King Rayhan led his soldiers to battle against Shatabhuja in the land of Jangbad.

It was a prolonged war and thousands of soldiers died on each side. King Rayhan was a brave soldier himself, and after a horrendous fight, he was able to destroy King Shatabhuja. As he came out victorious in the war, he found King Kaiser's headless body lying in battle ground. With a sad heart, King Rayhan rescued all women, including the dead king's wife, from the prison and disclosed to her the horrible news. He returned to his kingdom accompanied by the mourning queen of Kaiser. The queen came to Sirajnagar to be united with her only son. Rayhan appointed one of his wise counselors as a caretaker ruler of Jangbad.

*Chapter 9: Death of King Rayhan*

King Rayhan came back to his palace and requested his queen to accept King Kaiser's widowed queen as a prospective mother-in-law of their only daughter. After the mourning period was over for Chittahar and his mother, King Rayhan arranged for the wedding ceremony between Chittahar and his daughter. Within a short while, death approached and claimed the lives of King Rayhan and his Queen. Chittahar took over the throne and lived happily with his bride and his mother. The citizens of that land knew that their king had seven sons, but they did not know where they were. So, none opposed when King Rayhan's son-in-law became the king.

Jalal decided to meet King Chittahar, and with that intention, he left for the palace asking the seven brothers to wait for him in a marketplace. King Chittahar was happy to meet Jalal who had brought the real heirs back to Sirajnagar. He was ready to step down from the throne; his mother, however, was a little reluctant to give up the luxuries she enjoyed as a king's mother.

*Chapter 10: The Princes Returned Home*

After many years, the seven sons of King Rayhan returned home. Both of their parents were dead; their evil stepmother was also dead, and most of all, their stepsister's husband was an honest man with a heart of a saint. King Chittahar was relieved to hand over his duty to the eldest of the brothers. He then wanted to dedicate his life to the worship of the Lord. He was even eager to retire from worldly life and live in the forest as a hermit. The royal advisors advised him not to make a rash decision. They then suggested that Chittahar should consult with Jalal—the wise benevolent prince of Shimail.

When Chittahar disclosed to Jalal his decision to live as a hermit, Jalal gave him a solution: that Chittahar could share his time with God and family. He could also either rule Jangbad, his father's kingdom, or share it with his new-found brothers; after all, their father was the one who defeated and freed Jangbad from the hands of Shatabhaja.

Chittahar gladly accepted this proposal. The only thing that concerned him now was his mother's reaction to his decision to hand over the throne to the rightful princes. Then he himself came up with a solu-

tion and acted immediately. He went to his mother and suggested that they should give the kingdom back to those whom it belonged; after all, how could he fight with the seven strong princes who rightfully deserved that throne? However, his mother could establish her authority over this land by marrying her niece to the eldest of the seven sons. Her niece would then be the queen of this land, and he could go back to rule his father's kingdom. His mother gladly agreed to this proposition. The wedding was arranged; the eldest of the sons got married and ascended the throne. Chittahar became the King of Jangbad, and Prince Jalal resumed his journey to complete his final mission.

*Chapter 11: In Search of the Death Giver*

Prince Jalal left in search of the Glendoveer Princess for whom King Aardbel's son suffered death in life. His faithful carrier, the giant, flew him to the land of King Shamsheer. When they reached there, they both made themselves invisible: one had magical power, while the other had a cloak to become invisible. They entered the gate of that kingdom, and the faithful giant asked Jalal to go alone from there, for he had no power to enter King Shamsheer's land.

Jalal entered the enchanting land where day and night had no enmity. Jalal saw how a star-bright night could turn into daylight and return to darkness again. He felt happy and relaxed as he entered the garden of the immortality well. Flowers bloomed and filled the air with heavenly fragrance; everywhere was a sense of mirth and peace. Jalal was thankful to God for making him suffer so much through his life; after all, who could earn peace without pain in this world? Even if one could win easily, that easily-earned victory lacked grace and satisfaction. Jalal could enjoy the pleasures of heavenly calm in this garden because his prolonged sufferings made it well-deserved. He saw beautiful maidens wandering freely in the garden, and because his heart was filled with love for Rupbanu, he was not tempted by them. His heart became soft and he was not in the mood to shed any more blood. Thus, as he reached the well and found it well-guarded by a magnanimous creature with three heads, he refrained from killing it. He took a wide leaf of a water lily and dived into the well for its water. Poisonous spears and nails wounded him, but he did not die; his magical ring saved him. He carefully held the big leaf on his palms and hastened back to the place where his giant-ride was waiting. King

Aardbel's giant gently placed Jalal on his shoulders once again and flew as fast as he could.

They reached home safely. King Aardbel was relieved to see Jalal return with the antidote. The dead Prince came back to life after drinking water from the immortality well.

His disease of love, however, was not cured. The moment he came to life, he began thinking about his love for his death-giver. He shared his thought with Jalal, and Jalal tried to cure him of that disease with his words. Jalal's words failed to convince the prince; instead, he convinced Jalal to help him attain his Beloved. Both Jalal and Prince Digvijay knew that King Aardbel would never let his son commit the same crime. So, Jalal came up with a plan which he thought would make the king change his mind.

The next day, Jalal went to see the king and reported that Prince Digvijay wanted to avenge his sufferings. He wanted to punish his Mahemanir for playing with his life. The prince therefore wanted to start a war against Shamsheer—the Glendoveer king—whose daughter caused all these troubles. Jalal added that he also supported this idea because it would set an example before wicked women who always attempted to play games with innocent youths. Jalal's argument convinced King Aardbel; trusting Jalal's judgment, he therefore ordered his men to prepare for a battle.

With the king's complete support, Jalal's secret plan ran smoothly. Within weeks Aardbel's giants were prepared for a battle; King Aardbel took the command and rode his royal Chariot, accompanied by his noblemen, Jalal, and Prince Digvijay. Jalal worked as a war consultant and manipulated the giant king's decision. As soon as their soldiers flew near King Shamsheer's territory, Jalal convinced them to land in an isolated area. He then argued that to engage in a war without cause was not suitable for a righteous king, like Aardbel. He asked everyone to think of a solid excuse to start a war. Since no one offered any suggestions, Jalal came up with one interesting excuse: he suggested that King Aardbel should send a messenger to King Shamsheer with a proposal of marriage between his daughter and King Aardbel's son. It was sure that a demigod would never agree to marry his daughter to a giant's son; hence, a war would be justified. Yet, in case King Shamsheer accepted the proposal, Digvijay would have his complete control over his enemy and could take his revenge. King Aardbel's advisors agreed to this diplomacy and so did King Aardbel. But he wanted his son's approval on that; after all, Digvijay was the one who would pay the

price if the plan failed. The poor man would have to marry his enemy! Prince Jalal and a royal advisor went to convince Digvijay. Witnessing Digvijay's willingness to be used as a decoy in this war, the noble man's heart filled with admiration. He was amazed to see Jalal's diplomatic skill. The wise royal advisor had no idea that these two princes had planned the whole drama and had fooled everyone!

King Aardbel was happy to know that his son had no objection to Jalal's plan. He then wrote a letter to King Shamsher asking for his daughter as a bride for his son. When the messenger went to the city with that letter, the guards at the city gate tried to kill him thinking him as an intruder. Then the messenger revealed to the guards his intention and the guards escorted him to their king. As he reached the palace, he bowed before King Shamsher and delivered the letter. King Shamsher and his court read it, and after a long moment of silence, the King's spokesmen expressed their view. The letter itself conveyed a generous intention no doubt, but, said one spokesman, an ugly prince of the giants should never even imagine marrying the princess of a demigod. This marriage proposal was an impossible effort. King Aardbel's messenger was brave enough to state that their prince, giant-born though he was, was not less charming than the demigods; in fact, he believed the beauty of demigods would pale before his prince. This announcement created a thunderous roar of laughter at the court. "Can you show us your most handsome prince?" asked King Shamsher, "The marriage proposal is viable only if what you say is true." "I need a written statement from Your Highness then," politely the messenger replied. King Shamsher wrote a letter to King Aardbel that he needed to see Prince Digvijay before he could consider the marriage proposal.

King Aardbel and his people read that letter and waited for Jalal's decision. Prince Jalal stated that the soldiers should hide in the mountains and wait for his orders; in the meantime, he decided to take Digvijay to Prince Shamsher's court. He ordered every member of Aardbel's troop to be discreet; Digvijay's life would once again be in danger if the demigods found out the real intention of King Aardbel. Jalal manipulated the whole incident so skillfully that no one found any reason to be suspicious about the plan. Next morning, following Jalal's advice, all the giants went to a secret hiding place in the mountains while Jalal and Prince Digvijay galloped towards the palace of King Shamsher, followed by a chariot full of noble giants.

*Chapter 12: A Visit to the City of Demigods*

Prince Jalal and Prince Digvijay reached the Palace gate; being informed by a messenger of their arrival, King Shamsher and his advisors came out in their own chariots to have a look. King Shamsher did not expect to see such a good looking prince; He was impressed by Digvijay's good looks. He commanded his servants to welcome the royal guests to his court. When Digvijay entered the court with Jalal, the king invited him to sit beside him. But the prince declined the offer saying that he would not accept a seat until Prince Jalal was shown equal respect. His words impressed King Shamsher even more. He offered Jalal and Prince Digvijay equal courtesy. He wanted to know why an offspring of a ferocious giant had so much respect for a petty human being. Upon his inquiry, Digvijay narrated the story of Jalal's benevolent missions.

King Shamsher was pleased to see the dignity and self control of this prince. He gave order to take good care of these two princes. He then withdrew from the court and went to his quarter to consult with his Queen. He had now no reason to oppose a marriage between such a handsome prince and his beautiful daughter. The Queen saw her future son-in-law and she also had no objection. She requested her king to arrange for the wedding ceremony without any delay.

After finalizing the wedding plan, Jalal went secretly to meet King Aardbel in the mountains and asked him to go back to his kingdom in order to prepare for the wedding; King Aardbel promptly obeyed. Both the kingdoms then started to prepare for a gala wedding. The festival in Shamsher's kingdom ran for days. King Aardbel made a formal appearance at King Shamsher's court; Prince Digvijay, dressed as a bridegroom, accompanied his father. The wedding ceremony continued for seven days after which King Aardbel wished to return to his kingdom with his son and the new bride. Arrangements were made for the departure of a loving princess. Relatives and friends and well-wishers showered a rain of tears; the royal parents generously distributed gifts among their subjects; chariots full of treasures and wealth were given to Prince Digvijay as wedding gifts. King Shamsher also had a special wedding gift for his son-in-law: it was a magical wish-pouch. The king explained to Digvijay that the pouch had the power to fulfill their material needs. Prince Digvijay accepted the special gift and asked for King Shamsher's blessings. The moment arrived for King Shamsher to confront the truth: his daughter belonged to him no more.

The most powerful king of the demigods shed relentless tears as he gave away his daughter. "Dear son-in-law," he pleaded, "from now on, my little girl is moving away from my loving care to your affectionate love. I urge you not to be cruel to her; I advise you to forgive and amend her faults. Remember, that she will have no one besides you in that far away land. You are now responsible to provide her food and shelter; be generous to her. I am giving her to you in God's name, and God will punish you if you do her any wrong!"

"She deserves to be respected and loved," replied Prince Digvijay. "Besides, I know what can happen if I hurt her feelings! But please advise your daughter to be respectful to my parents; I will be content if she made them happy."

King Shamsheer held his daughter's hand and spoke, "my Darling, you should never disrespect your in-laws and your husband. Remember, it is your duty to obey your husband's every word. For a wife, her husband is the ultimate authority after God; you will be rewarded in this world and in afterlife if you can make your husband happy."

Princess Mahemanir promised to abide by her father's words and left her paternal home to spend the rest of her life with her husband.

### *Chapter 13: All Ended Well*

The wedding convoy reached King Aardbel's territory safely. The Queen Mother gave a hearty reception to the new bride and took her into the palace. Night appeared to allow the travelers some rest after the day-long feast was over. All went to their rooms for a good night rest while the newly wedded resumed their marital bliss in their own bed chamber.

At the wake of dawn, the anxious King approached Prince Jalal; he did not want his son to punish the new bride and initiate a war between two kingdoms for no apparent reason. True, that his son had suffered tremendously because of the anger of the Glendoveer princess. But now that the princess became his wife, Digvijay ought to honor his wife and respect her prestigious family. King Aardbel also was worried about the fate of the other wife. He did not have the heart to see another woman suffer for no crime of her own. Jalal listened carefully and then expressed his desire to converse with the prince in private. Once the two princes were alone, they praised each other for successfully carrying out such a dangerous plan. Digvijay expressed his gratitude

and Jalal acknowledged the brotherly bond that they had formed with each other. The two princes embraced each other; Jalal's missions were accomplished, and Digvijay had what he desired; King Aardbel was happy because his son had avenged his misfortune. The royal parents were happy to have their son back with them, safe and sound; the only problem that remained was the first wife of Prince Digvijay. King Aardbel stole her from her parents and now he felt responsible for her. Prince Digvijay assured Jalal that he would not let his first wife suffer either. He then told Jalal how he revealed his story of first marriage to Mahemanir the previous night, and received no rebuke from her. His new wife accepted the truth saying, "I now know how she feels for her husband, who is also mine. As a wife, I am obliged to wish well of my husband; therefore, I would not object to your other marriage which came to you as a responsibility. Besides, I fear nothing as long as I know I am the one you love." The new bride apologized for casting a spell that caused so much trouble. She blamed herself for initiating the other marriage which she knew, had taken place only for the well-being of her beloved. Jalal was thrilled to hear this good news. He wished the three a long life of marital bliss.

The generosity of the new bride also pleased the King and his queen when they heard about it from Jalal. The queen greeted her two daughters-in-law with affection and arranged for a grand bridal reception for them. Now that all ended well, Jalal felt that his mission was complete and he desired to return to his own beloved. The king and the queen along with Prince Digvijay were unwilling to let him go; but all eventually agreed that Jalal should now return to his own kingdom and serve his own people. They therefore arranged for Jalal's departure and gave him a warm farewell.

## BOOK THREE

### *The Ordeal of Rupbanu*

Meanwhile, after the ferocious eagle flew Prince Jalal from the boat, the old envoy and other sailors tried to follow the eagle with a futile hope of rescuing him. The bird flew out of sight, and the sailors fared the sea not knowing where to look for the kidnapped prince. The old envoy then decided to go back to Omar Nagar and stay there with the gardener until the prince returned. Upon his request, King Zamzam's sailors left her at Omar Nagar and went to inform their king of Prince Jalal's tragic fate. Ramambati went back to Shama's cottage and the two old women lamented over the miseries that Rup and Jalal were going through. Shama, Rup's gardener, was too shocked to take any decisions, while Ramambati did not have the heart to reveal such a cruel news to Rup. How could she tell a depressed lover that the man she was pining over had already married another woman? How could she deepen that sorrow by adding the news of his abduction by a bird? Neither of these women was heartless enough to destroy a wailing woman's hope. Therefore, Jalal's envoy and Rup's gardener decided to wait for the prince to come and explain himself to his wailing lover. When the envoy went to report to Rup, she just told the miserable lover that Prince Jalal was sailing back and would reach Omar Nagar any day. But days went by, and so did weeks, months, and a year. There was no trace of Jalal. Every day Rup strode beside the shore hoping to see the mast of a ship that would bring her lover home. And every day she would return home sad and dejected. She lost her mental peace; she became insane with yearning. She wandered the forests and strolled around the shore like a mad woman. The lamenting lover then expressed her emotional frenzy in words turning them into her songs of lament. She sang her twelve songs throughout the twelve month of the year; yet, her lover did not come<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Bengali Calendar has twelve months: Baishakh, Jaishtha, Ashadh, Sravan, Bhadra, Ashwin, Kartik, Ograhayan, Paus, Magh, Falgun, and Chaitra. There are six seasons; each season consists two months consecutively: summer, monsoon, autumn, fall, winter, and spring. This tradition of songs of separation was popular in early love lyrics, mostly in the romance tales which were based on the love relationship between Radha and Krishna in Hindu Mythology. Rup's twelve songs of year long separation reiterates the Bengali romance tradition. See Sen, *History of Bengali Literature*.

## 1

Flowers bloom as *Baishakh* comes  
 With a bouquet of sweet fragrance.  
 Bees and birds, butterflies, and insects  
 Drink honey from the blossom.  
 Nature's fun inspires women  
 And arouses their desire  
 They stay in with their men,  
 To enjoy sensual pleasure.  
 For my own sin the man of my dreams  
 Travels in distant places.  
 In a lonely bed, sadly I spend  
 My nights in sleepless tears.

## 2

*Jaishtha* comes in. Fruit trees shine  
 With fruit, ripe and juicy.  
 Young lovers feed each other  
 Plump fruit. My destiny  
 Prevents me from enjoying my time  
 How can I savor food, when  
 My lover is gone? Food is poison  
 For me now; I only want my man.  
 If sleep haunts for a moment  
 He comes to me in my dream.  
 I wake up and run; I search for man,  
 But he is no where to be seen.

## 3

*Ashadh* startles us with roaring thunders  
 My heart dreads to think of danger  
 That might have captured my love.  
 For his safety, I offer my prayers.  
 Young women are enjoying pleasure  
 Those happy women! How fortunate they are!  
 Ill-fated I am. I am not meant  
 To marry the man I desire  
 Lord, Almighty. bring him back to me  
 Please, bring him back home safe.  
 Save him from danger; listen to my prayer,  
 Dear God, look after the man I love.

## 4

The month of *Sravan* pours monsoon rain  
 Darkness envelops whole nature.  
 The sky falls apart and breaks my heart  
 Like rain drops, I tremble in fear.  
 At a time like this where is he? Which  
 Paths does he tread? And what hurdles  
 Block his ways? I wish I could erase  
 All the dangers that lie in his path.

## 5

*Bhadra* is a dangerous month. Ferocious  
 Tidal waves threaten rivers  
 My heart falters as it sees no hope. Tears  
 Betray my eyes; what if he is  
 Trying to return? What if this rain  
 Has caused a flood? How would he return?  
 And what if his boat or his ship  
 Sinks in the deep ocean?  
 My heart sinks in sorrow. Fate brings  
 Me nothing but loads of despair.  
 My lover suffers in a remote place  
 And for him, I suffer here.

## 6

With *Ashwin* ends the rain  
 Roads and paths are dry.  
 Yet he doesn't come. Why is he taking so long?  
 My hope now withers away.  
 Months pass by without him. I  
 Pine for his passion.  
 Who is he with? Who steals my mirth?  
 Who is this other woman?  
 I have a feeling that he is enjoying  
 Another woman's love.  
 A man is but a cunning flirt  
 He loves to diminish hope.

## 7

*Kartik's* bright shiny moonlight  
 Ignites in a woman's heart  
 The fire of passion. Fate has shunned  
 My hope. My dreams fall apart  
 As I see women enjoying their men  
 Under the lovely full moon.  
 My heart melts down. Where is my moon?  
 Who is blocking my vision?

## 8

*Ograhayan* chills the earth down.  
 Now it is the fall season.  
 The cold air makes my heart shudder;  
 I am worried, all for good reasons.  
 For me, he has chosen to give up his throne  
 For me he may have died.  
 Maybe the giants have killed the man  
 For whom I agonize.  
 Maybe he suffers in cold weather,  
 Or maybe he is happy.  
 Maybe he is living in bliss,  
 While I weep in misery.

## 9

When *Paush* darkens the earth, my body trembles  
 With the advance of winter.  
 The chilling weather has me in its power  
 It's constantly making me suffer.  
 Lonely I wait for the owner of my heart  
 He is my life's breath.  
 If I die now, he wouldn't know,  
 Oh! I dread to have such a lonely death!  
 Rescue me from this drudgery,  
 Save me from this desolation.  
 My cold heart darkens; I beg you, dear Prince,  
 Return for my salvation!

## 10

The month of *Magh* is also full of chills  
 Nature shivers in cold  
 Make my body warm take me in your arms  
 And cover me with your love-blanket.  
 Frosts and dews cover the grass  
 The sun refuses to shine.  
 Defiant weather deepens despair.  
 This sunken heart of mine  
 Worries for him. How can he come  
 In this dismal weather?  
 Paths are lost. How can he cross  
 The roaring oceans afar?

## 11

In the month of *Falgun* the fire of passion  
 Burns a burning heart.  
 It is spring time: Nature's mating time.  
 All day long, the cuckoo-bird  
 Sings its mating song, sitting  
 On the branch of a tree.  
 Gentle breeze blows; my heart overflows  
 With passion; spring is killing me!  
 A suffering soul can only tell  
 What torments my heart  
 It is *Falgun*, a passionate season  
 When lovers mustn't be apart.

## 12

The impact of spring in *Chaitra* is intense.  
 O! Her aroused body is ablaze!  
 Only her lover can soothe her  
 With his sensual caress.  
 Yearning for him increases suffering;  
 My body is a burning flame.  
 I can not endure this pain any more  
 I'll die by drinking venom.  
 I don't know how I can seek out this man;  
 He seems to have vanished in thin air!  
 It's been a year since I've seen my prince  
 And the year seems longer than a year!  
 Shama, the gardener and Ramabati, the messenger  
 Comfort me with false words,

I have this uncanny feeling inside me;  
 In my head, I hear a voice of caution:  
 The voice inside my head keeps telling me that  
 My prince is in love with another woman.  
 “Thoughts are but weapons that hurt  
 Worries bring no reward.  
 You will be saved,” Faizun reports,  
 “If you believe In God.”

*Prince Jalal Returned*

It was a dead dark night when Rupbanu’s gardener and Prince Jalal’s messenger heard someone knocking at their small house in the woods of Omar Nagar. They heard a strange voice asking them to open the door. First they were frightened; then they were overjoyed to recognize the voice. The lover had returned! The two well-wishers greeted their prince; happiness brought them into tears.

“Dear gardening woman,” The prince inquired,  
 “When did you see the monsters last?”  
 “One night we heard so much commotion  
 That we thought the sky was falling down.  
 Lightning struck and pierced the earth  
 Thunder roared, and we thought the wrath  
 Of the ferocious giant would devour us.  
 All night long we had no peace.  
 Then morning came, and we stepped out.  
 No monster guards were there on sight.  
 We haven’t heard or seen since then,  
 The ugly faces of our captors again.”  
 Being assured that the enemy was destroyed,  
 Jalal wanted to meet his beloved.  
 “I saw her but once, and had no scope  
 To express to her how much I love!  
 I want to behold my luminous moon.  
 Let me see her. Take me to her soon.”  
 Shama the gardener went to tell Rup  
 The good news. “Don’t give me false hope,”  
 Retorted Rup, “I know he will not return  
 Either he’s dead, or he is having fun  
 With another woman.” “Trust me this time,”  
 Shama said, “And with a joy, sublime,  
 You will be blessed when I’ll bring  
 The man who caused all these sufferings.”  
 The two well-wishers united the lovers.

When Rup and Jalal saw each other,  
 Both fell unconscious, for they never thought  
 They would meet again. Now destiny brought  
 Them together; as they regained consciousness  
 They both wept. Then Rupbanu became suspicious:  
     What if it was all his pretense?  
     What if he came just to keep his promise?  
 And then he'd leave to be with the other woman,  
     With whom he had been staying so long?  
     So, she retreated from her lover.  
 She covered her face that was blazing in anger.  
     She veiled her face and looked away.  
     Jalal thought, "She is feeling shy;  
 Being a respectable woman, she hesitates to be  
     With a stranger. So she doesn't look at me."  
     Shama knew what went in her heart.  
 She whispered in her ear, "Do not to stay apart  
     Now that the prince had finally come."  
 "Why do I care? Where does he come from?  
     Does he know how his long absence  
     Burdened me with tremendous pain?  
     Does he know, or does he even care  
     When he left me in a dungeon of despair?  
     How should he know? Only who suffers  
 Knows the pain of a sufferer. Had I known before,  
     I'd never have loved this cruel prince.  
     He devours on my sufferings.  
 I cried for him and he enjoyed pleasure  
     With another beauty. I burn with fire  
     Of passion; I live, not I, my body lives.  
     While my heart is wherever he is.  
     He killed me already with his amour  
     Tell him he cannot kill me any more.  
     For I am dead, and he is free  
     To go back to his other lady."  
 "She wasn't shy then!" Mused the Prince,  
 "It's her jealous heart that thus screams!"  
 To her, he said, "When my lover suffers misery  
     How can I be so relaxed and happy?  
     For you, my lady, I've gambled my life  
     For you I've endured struggles and strife.  
     With you I left my wounded heart.  
     To be with you forever, I stayed apart.  
     I faced danger, in lands, skies, and oceans.  
     I fought tigers, snakes, demons, and lions.  
 I died almost a thousand times, but revived again.  
     My love for you worked as my talisman.

And now I return to be rebuked by you.  
 You'll believe me, if my love is true."  
 The Prince decided to leave that place,  
 After these words; she then held his hands,  
 And asked to be forgiven. It was true, she said  
 That he gave up his throne for her. He had  
 Confronted dangers because of her.  
 He shouldn't suffer more; those days were over.  
 She looked at him. What a handsome face!  
 Was it a dream? Can a human have such heavenly grace?  
 The happy prince then sang a merry melody  
 His beloved was with him; his heart sang in rhapsody.

*The Lovers' Quarrel*

'Dear love, tell me how can I live? Tell me.  
 How can I live seeing your cruelty? My heart I gave thee  
 My thoughts and emotions are all for you. I live for you only;  
 And you kill me with your cruelty.  
 Take pity, O, take pity on me. Be kind, generous, and remember  
 We'll always be together. You and I are forever, for each other.  
 If you desert me, this soul will no longer be.'  
 Thus he sang this song, and then he told her  
 How valiant he was in the faces of dangers  
 That life threw at him. He described how he was captured  
 By the demons, fairies, and enchanters,  
 He told her how he suffered imprisonments  
 And how bravely he tackled each situation.  
 His tales fascinated and impressed the lover.  
 As she heard of his brevity, she loved him more.  
 The lovers thus reconciled after a quarrel.  
 Together they sat and ate a grand meal.  
 After they ate the delectable dishes,  
 They savored desserts and chewed betel leaves.  
 The happy couple's expression began to change:  
 She looked coy, while he looked tensed.  
 Shama read their facial expressions,  
 She stepped out of the room leaving the lovers alone.  
 Pulling Rup towards him Jalal passionately said,  
 "You are my poison and my antidote,  
 My disease you are, and you are the remedy.  
 You wound me, hurt me, and give me malady.  
 The disease that I believe I have,  
 Can be cured only with the touch of your love.  
 Will you cure me with your caress?"

Rup softly whispered, "I suffer no less.  
 I am all yours, do what you please."  
 Jalal was happy to hear her words;  
 He placed his lover on his lap and held  
 Her close. The two hungry lovers clasped  
 Each other desperately. One grasped  
 The other and wished to have  
 The satisfaction of a consummated love.  
 Jalal felt the urge and so did Rup;  
 They kissed and caressed and groped each other.  
 Their bodies burned with carnal desire!  
 But guided by conscience and moral fear,  
 They abstained from experiencing the ultimate pleasure.  
 Sweet is the first knowledge of sensuality  
 But the lovers decided to cherish the chastity  
 Of their relationship till their wedding night.  
 "I do not want to wait any longer, Jalal whined,  
 Tomorrow I will go and ask for my mother's consent;  
 I'll then come back to claim you as my own.  
 Since my carnal lust has begun to grow,  
 My heart does not wish to follow  
 Reason's command. My patience and my self-control  
 Is melting away. Who would be so foolish, after all,  
 To starve when he has delicious food waiting for him?  
 How can a kiss, or a caress redeem  
 The gorging hunger of my lustful heart?  
 The scorching passion increases my thirst.  
 Yet, this thirst, I can not quench,  
 Even though my river is within my reach.  
 My hungry heart, and my thirsty soul  
 are ready to forfeit self-control!"  
 Rupbanu laughed at his frustration.  
 She did not object to his decision.  
 She just begged him to come back soon;  
 She would die if she lost him again.  
 Jalal sped his horse towards his kingdom.  
 After a few days, when he reached home,  
 People of Shimail did not recognize him.  
 They thought he was a traveling prince  
 As they stopped him on the way and asked his name,  
 He was just a stranger, he told them.  
 Then he asked one to inform the queen,  
 That he had brought message from her prince.  
 When the Queen heard about this strange messenger,  
 She wanted to meet him; being ordered by the queen mother,  
 The royal advisors went to escort the man to their town.  
 Jalal's tent was in the farthest end of that land.

The courtiers found the stranger outside his tent.  
 At first Jalal did not notice the noble men.  
 He was thinking of his mother and his beloved, Rup;  
 He knew for sure that his mother wouldn't approve  
 His decision to marry a woman of lower status.  
 He wanted to see how she reacted to the news.  
 So when the royal members approached him,  
 He decided not to reveal his name.  
 Thus, as he sat there, the noblemen approached;  
 And what did he do? Let me narrate in prose.

*The Royal Ministers met a Stranger*

Advisors from the royal court of Shimail arrived at the place where the stranger was waiting for the Queen's response. Hiding his identity, Jalal greeted the wise royal counselors with respect. One of them asked Jalal to report what he knew of the missing prince of Shimail. Why did the prince decide to send a messenger to his own kingdom? What was preventing the prince from coming home? Was Prince Jalal in danger? Jalal smiled at all these inquiries. "Your prince went on a mission," he politely said, "and he has accomplished his task. He is waiting for Her Majesty's consent. He will come back only if she allows him to marry the girl of his choice; or else, he would stay where he is, marrying her without the queen's permission. There is a possibility that your queen might object because he has fallen in love with an honest merchant's daughter." The wise counselors remained quiet. They hesitated to comment before consulting the queen. The queen had no objection to Prince Jalal's choice. A mother's heart would be contented with joy once she saw his son's happy face. The queen mother therefore promised to accept a merchant's daughter as the future queen of her kingdom. The royal advisors came to meet the stranger once again; and this time, after hearing the queen's response, the stranger introduced himself as "Prince Jalal of Shimail." He then accompanied the noblemen to the palace where a worried mother was waiting for the son she had not seen for years. When the anxious mother saw her son's face, she cried with joy; she fainted, and then regained her consciousness, with joy. Thus a happy reunion between a mother and her only son took place. Now, I prefer to narrate the rest of the incidents in verse; so hear me rhyme my thoughts, dear brothers:

*Preparation for the Wedding*

The happy mother, seeing the dejected face  
 Of her son, ordered everyone to make haste  
 And prepare for his wedding: "It is unwise," said she  
 "To postpone a task for which he suffered endlessly.  
 Prepare for the wedding, send invitations  
 To neighboring kingdoms. And send a man  
 With a letter addressed to the bride's foster mother;  
 She should make plans for the wedding of her daughter.  
 Send for musicians, dancers and performers.  
 Make all arrangements," ordered Jalal's mother.  
 Her orders were promptly obeyed.  
 The wedding announcement successfully spread  
 A sense of happy feeling; it stimulated every one;  
 The people of Shimail were bursting in excitement.  
 Honorable wedding guests started to arrive  
 From lands far and wide; Shimail was alive  
 Again! Musicians played all night long  
 Their joyous and melodious wedding songs.  
 With rhythmic beat of the drumming bands  
 Women tapped their tender feet on the ground.  
 Or was it that they were really tapping on the hearts  
 Of men? As they seductively moved their curved waists  
 Like raising waves, the world was lost! Men went insane!  
 They dreamed to be loved by those dancing women.  
 When the dancing beauties clapped their hands,  
 Their hands touched each other; or did they caress those men?  
 When the dancers placed their hands on their chests,  
 Men just saw their firm, round breasts.  
 The seductive dance and men's imagination  
 Added more charm to the whole situation.  
 Singers sang as poets recited their poems.  
 Drummers beat their heart out with them.  
 Trumpets, harmonica, *sitar*,<sup>63</sup> *esraj*,<sup>64</sup>  
 Flute, violin, trombone, and *pakhwaz*-<sup>65</sup>  
 All these instruments were being played  
 By skilled performers. The kingdom remained  
 Under the spell of such festive frenzy  
 For a month. Finally, the queen declared that she  
 Now wanted the wedding to begin.

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<sup>63</sup> A three-stringed instrument.

<sup>64</sup> A kind of violin.

<sup>65</sup> A stringed musical instrument.

With the tune of *Shanai*<sup>66</sup>  
 The wedding ceremony began officially.  
 The ritual bath for the bride groom  
 Was prepared. Aromatic oil and perfumes  
 Were brought. On a gold chair, Prince Jalal sat,  
 Surrounded by beautiful female attendants.  
 With perfumed oil they massaged his body;  
 Their hands were tense; their hearts, greedy.  
 Women who loved, and desired him,  
 As they touched his toned body, his muscular limbs,  
 And his gentle face, they felt a surge of sensation  
 That swiping through their bodies and numbed their minds!  
 As they touched his skin, their passion rose.  
 Those pretty attendants, his royal masseuses,  
 Paid too much attention to his back and chest  
 They pressed on him their tender breasts.  
 They rubbed his face, and massaged his thighs  
 His body was soaked in oil and their sighs!  
 They sighed, for this was the day they'd touch him last  
 They sighed because they all knew that  
 He was never meant to be their lover. They  
 Cleaned him well and dried his body.  
 After that they dressed the groom in wedding suit  
 Especially tailored and embroidered in pure gold.  
 They placed on his head a golden crown.  
 The groom was ready. He then began  
 His journey, accompanied by the noble men  
 Of the court. Bandsmen marched before him;  
 Then walked the guards, and soldiers followed them  
 On horseback; next, followed the elephants  
 Carrying wedding presents and attendants.  
 Hundreds of men with loads of presents  
 Followed. On a royal chariot rode the prince.  
 After a long journey they reached that place  
 They announced their arrival by cracking fireworks  
 With fireworks, they turned night into day.  
 Fire-flowers exploded and brightened the sky.  
 Flying fires danced up high. Fire-stars then joined other stars.  
 So many stars, the sky could hold no more.  
 The noise of crackers shook the ground  
 People were afraid to hear such a loud sound.  
 Fire then flew in circular motion  
 Trees were covered with fiery blossom.

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<sup>66</sup> A traditional musical instrument played during wedding ceremonies.

Fire flew away with wind.  
 Fire sparked with glowing wings.  
 Fireworks brought a luminous night there.  
 It was a fire-garden at Omar Nagar!  
 People of that land meanwhile were also ready;  
 They showed the groom proper hospitality.  
 The bridesmaids were busy inside  
 With their job of preparing the bride.  
 The first ceremony was seven days long;  
 It took place in a solitary mansion.  
 While men were being entertained  
 By beautiful singing and dancing women,  
 Bridesmaids were busy with wedding rituals.  
 The first six days they bathed Rup with perfumed oils.  
 They massaged her body with floral extracts.  
 With henna they painted her feet and hands.  
 On the seventh day this ceremony was done.  
 Happy bridesmaid then sang wedding songs.  
 They gave her a final bath and happily they sang.  
 Faizun writes the song here. Dear readers, listen:

*A Wedding Song*

Water carriers      carried water  
 In their pitchers, from yonder river.  
 They had no time to waste      so they walked in haste  
 On their slender waists they carried their pitchers.  
 So they brought water      from yonder river  
 And stored them for the Bridal shower.  
 On a golden throne      the bride was borne  
 The bridesmaid started to bathe her.  
 The bridesmaids then      started to sing;  
 They sang a melodious tune for Rup.  
 They sang God's grace,      they washed her face  
 They washed her hair with sandalwood soap.  
 Some scrubbed her neck,      some scrubbed her back,  
 While some poured scented water over her.  
 When the bathing was over,      they carried her  
 To a room and fanned her hair to dry.  
 They rubbed on her scalp      some scented hair oil  
 Then they brushed her hair carefully.  
 They parted her      long, black hair  
 Just in the middle, and then,  
 Twisting each part,      they gave it a shape  
 Of overlapping, coiled bun.



*In the Bridal Chamber*

The gardener, old envoy, and other women  
 Escorted the prince to the bridal chamber. Then  
 Came the bride with her attendants of her own.  
 All left, and finally Jalal was alone  
 With his new bride. He held her close,  
 He looked at her, and spoke soft words.  
 Desire benumbed them; they gave up reserve,  
 They gave up all fear. And they made love.  
 Unaware they were of night's departure;  
 Hardly they slept, when their wedding rapture  
 Was broken by loud cawing of crows.  
 Darkness vanished as the sun rose.  
 The prince, touched by the light of dawn,  
 Woke up, bathed, and left her alone.  
 He was greeted by men, wise, old, and young.  
 He told them he couldn't stay there long.  
 He wished to return to his kingdom soon  
 With his bride. For he knew that the queen  
 Was anxiously waiting to see her son.  
 He went back to the zenana again.  
 His men had feast, while he had his feast on love  
 he consumed love of his beloved, Rup.  
 Days and nights and weeks went stealthily  
 One morning, the prince told his lady,  
 That he wished to return home, if she agreed.  
 His wife smiled. She'd do whatever he pleased  
 Because she was his, she would obey his command.  
 Jalal decided to return to his land.

*Homecoming*

As a legal guardian of Rup's estate  
 Jalal decided that he should appoint  
 The gardener and his messenger as the caretakers.  
 He appointed some men to assist his well-wishers.  
 These two women had done so much for him the past years  
 That Jalal thought they were well-deserving of such rewards.  
 So, thanking his well-wishers, Prince Jalal,  
 Took his new bride to his kingdom in Shimail.  
 There the queen mother was waiting, anxious and excited.  
 In front of each room of her mansion, she had placed  
 A gold-pot full of water, topped with mango leaves.  
 She ordered to plant rows of Banana trees

To form a gateway for the bridal entrance.  
 She ordered performers to sing and dance  
 To welcome her son and his new bride.  
 Upon arrival, Jalal kissed his mother's feet.  
 Blessing her son, the happy Queen  
 Received his bride from the palanquin.  
 Such a beautiful bride! No, it was her daughter!  
 The queen mother thought. Rupbanu had won her.  
 She sprinkled rose water over her new daughter  
 And took her inside. Flowers, festoons, food and laughter  
 Filled the air of Shimail for a month. The queen then  
 Ordered her advisors to arrange for a coronation:  
 She would crown Prince Jalal as the King of this land.  
 People were happy to be under his command.  
 The new King served his land all day.  
 Then he relaxed at night with his lovely lady.  
 He thus lived a prosperous new life.  
 But what happened to his other wife?

### *Hurbanu*

Hurbanu lamented	as she waited
The safe return	of her husband.
Days and nights	her broken heart
Suffered endlessly.	Her misery
Nobody knew.	What she went through
Knew no one.	Where was the man
Who tortured her?	Did he suffer
Like her?	Had desire
Burnt his heart,	as it had
Hers? Body and soul	she gave him all.
She had no will	to live. She fell ill.
She ate no food,	drank no fluid.
She cared not	to live. Her thoughts
Were all for him.	She burnt within;
She pined for her	heart-breaker.
She wished that	she were dead.
Would he return?	Would he come soon?
Would he never come?	Did danger befall him?
Was he no more?	She would die, therefore.
What good was her life?	She was a wretched wife,
Whose husband never	had cared for her,
Yet she loved	him with all his heart.
She prayed	to the mighty Lord
To give her peace	in death. Since his

Absence would surely	kill her. Her misery
Should end.	“Have patience,”
Says Faizun,	“You’ll be happy soon.”

*King Jalal’s Dream*

While Hurbanu cried and prayed for her husband,  
 One night, King Jalal had a bad dream. And  
 In his dream he saw Hurbanu crying.  
 He woke up, feeling responsible for her suffering.  
 For him an innocent woman endured pain  
 For this God would surely punish him when  
 He died. What should he do? How could he tell Rup  
 That once he had disrespected her love?  
 He took another wife and left her alone  
 As he came back to claim Rup as his own.  
 Now this conflict: should he be tortured by guilty conscience,  
 Or should he reveal to Rupbanu the terrible incident?  
 He was worried and sad, and he lost his peace.  
 Rupbanu saw his change. She thought his  
 Anguish might be because of her;  
 How had she had caused him so much despair?  
 She wanted to know what she had done  
 To pain him thus. For what reason  
 His face had no smile, and his heart, no peace?  
 What had she done to cause his distress?  
 Her persistence won, and he embraced her.  
 He kissed her and said, “Listen, my dear,  
 You do not cause but resolve  
 All my troubles. You are my love.  
 The prettiest of women, you are the apple of my eye,  
 With you I live, and for you I can die.  
 My life’s breath, your fault I don’t see.  
 It is my fault. O dear, it is me!  
 I have no heart to disclose to you  
 A fearful event; I fear to tell you.”  
 Rup assured him that she would hear and obey  
 His orders, as a faithful wife. With dismay,  
 The King confessed, that night he dreamt  
 Of Hurbanu, whom he had earlier met  
 And had to marry. In his dream he saw her crying;  
 He felt guilty for Hurbanu’s sufferings.  
 “Worry no more, be afraid no more,”  
 Advised Rupbanu, “If you are always thinking of her,  
 What can I do? It is all but true.

I know I should not blame you.  
 It is not you; it's in man's nature.  
 When he attains one woman, he desires another.  
 He worships a woman until he wins her.  
 He enjoys her youth; then his desire  
 For her wanes. His wife may be a heavenly beauty,  
 He would care no more. He would desperately  
 Run for a new youth, his new prey.  
 It is not your fault, therefore, I say.  
 The fault is mine; It's my own doing.  
 I should have thought about this when  
 I had time. It's but my destiny to suffer.  
 Do what you please. I care no more."  
 The guilty King implored his wife,  
 "Do not say so. You are my life.  
 How can you say I think of her,  
 When you know, only for you I care?  
 Believe me when I say, before tonight  
 I never thought of her. Because I'd dreamt  
 Of her pain, I felt obliged. My love, for you  
 I endured pain. I left my kingdom too.  
 I did not come back until I achieved  
 What you asked of me. I have tried  
 Hard to please you. Forgive me, dearest,  
 For what I just said. I promise, distress  
 Will never touch you." Rup listened to him and replied,  
 "I refuse to be a part of your guilt. I would  
 Because I love you, I will accept my fate,  
 But one should be true to one's thoughts and words.  
 What could I do if your words of love were false?  
 How would I know if you cared for me or not?  
 I will try to believe what you just said  
 That you love me most, that I am in your heart.  
 I trusted you, as I trust God.  
 I would believe you if you told  
 Me that this other woman was not love but  
 A moral duty. But I refuse to disregard  
 Ethics and truth, for I know God would hate pretense."  
 "Do not cry, please keep in mind," Said the King,  
 "I loved you so much that I could do anything  
 To win you. Marrying Hur was one such incident.  
 I married her to be saved. I was blinded  
 By your love. I had immense greed  
 Only for you. So I slighted every danger,  
 I married her only to return to you, my dear.  
 For you I married her. Without you, my life is barren;  
 I love you, while she is my obligation."

Both thus talked and reached a decision:  
 King Jalal would go and bring his first wife home.  
 Jalal narrated to his mother this unfortunate tale.  
 With her permission, he then set sail.  
 He reached again the land of King Zamzam  
 He met the old king, and went to the room  
 Where Hurbanu was still lamenting for her husband.  
 Jalal entered that room and he held her hand.  
 She wept in joy, and he begged her forgiveness  
 For his delay. He told her what trouble came across  
 As he left her. He told her of his strife.  
 He told her the total story of his life.  
 Hurbanu's heart ached as she heard his words.  
 She felt his pain. She then wiped her tears.  
 Now she was happy. Her husband returned.  
 The night they spent in burning passion.  
 It was a night of love, of sensual bliss;  
 So were other nights. King Jalal was happy with his  
 Wife there. He enjoyed every moment.  
 He was happy and he was content.  
 Then one day Rup's memory haunted him;  
 Memory brought guilt. The mortified King  
 Expressed his wish to return to his land.  
 King Zamzam then ordered his men  
 To arrange a royal hoard of dowry for Jalal.  
 Mounds of treasures, gems, gold, and pearl,  
 Horses, elephants, slaves, and so much more  
 Were given. With his wife, Jalal then left.  
 For his own land; after a long journey, he reached  
 His kingdom; the land of Shimail was ready again  
 To receive its king and another queen.

### *A Happy Ending*

So, King Jalal of Shimail came home safe.  
 He brought a wife and hoards full of  
 Royal presents. King Jalal's mother joyfully received  
 Another daughter. She then took Hurbanu inside to meet  
 Rupbanu. She advised them both to be tolerant.  
 She asked them to love each other, and their husband.  
 She was happy that both her new daughters were  
 Wise and pretty. The two wives then agreed to share  
 Their lives with one husband; the King was also happy  
 He loved them both and treated them equally.  
 A happy king and a wise man,

He ruled his kingdom with confidence.  
His people were pleased to have a righteous ruler.  
They were proud of a King who was just and fair.  
Thus, in the land of Shimail ruled King Jalal.  
He ruled with grace and was loved by all.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REREADING THE TEXT

#### *Rupjalal as a Counter-narrative of Masculinity*

Faizunnesa's *Rupjalal* might be interpreted as her attempt to present a counter narrative of masculinity in colonial (Islamic) Bengal. Although she makes no direct claim of doing so, a close textual reading points at her concerns about the complicated issues regarding masculine dominance in her society. The text is clearly a critique of masculinity as the story revolves around the hero's dangerous predicaments and valiant actions. Yet, this narrative comes from a woman who herself has had both an extraordinary and contradictory lifestyle. The narrator claims to have been influenced by her own life to write this tale, which invites the readers to expect a woman's tale, from a woman's perspective. However, Faizunnesa distorts that expectation by writing a man's tale. From beginning to end, *Rupjalal* remains a narrative on man. It starts and ends with a peaceful picture of domestic bliss as the righteous man controls his family as well as the kingdom. Faizunnesa takes the accepted norm of masculinity of her contemporary (religion-based) society and spins the tale. By writing men's values as they were during that time, she is analyzing Bengali Muslim men on their own established criteria of superiority. Hence, she presents a counter-narrative of masculine ideology established by Muslim male writers of the nineteenth century. All the male characters are portrayed in such a way that they either display manliness, and receive rewards, or they deviate and lower themselves to unmanly (both bestial and effeminate) status and suffer severe consequences. Thus, *Rupjalal* narrates a tale of "manful assertions"<sup>1</sup> as it demonstrates how Jalal asserts his manliness throughout the text.

Faizunnesa's critique of masculinity displays a close adherence to the colonial notion of masculinity. In Carlyle for example, manliness

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<sup>1</sup> See John Tosh, *A Man's Place* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999), 9.

is recognized with the qualities of valor and an imperturbable trust in the “upper power”<sup>2</sup> as an agent to uphold domestic, social, and moral order. Victorian masculinity focused primarily on “moral courage, athleticism, sexual purity, and stoicism”<sup>3</sup> and rendered to masculinity the status of “a hook to pull men into the social order,” or “a key to solving social problems.”<sup>4</sup> The colonial politics of masculinity also formulated around the Victorian discourse as it practiced its authority over the social order by recasting the colonial woman as a symbol of Bengal’s nationalist ideology.<sup>5</sup> The colonial Bengali man, as Sinha notes in her *Colonial Masculinity*, represented for the British rulers an “unnatural or perverted form of masculinity,” as he was constructed as an effeminate figure, in opposition to the “manly Englishman.”<sup>6</sup> Bengali Hindus “possessed a certain softness,”<sup>7</sup> as a result of which they failed to keep their independence and allowed “men of bolder and more hardy breeds”<sup>8</sup> to colonize them. Bengali Muslims, however, were not part of this effeminacy as they also belonged to Macaulay’s “bolder breeds.”<sup>9</sup> The Islamic doctrine assigned man a superior and assertive role in both the domestic and the public sphere. At home, he was the protector of women and children, and outside the domestic space, he had to assert himself against the white (Christian) colonizer and his Hindu comrades.<sup>10</sup> Effeminacy for a Muslim man was therefore the ultimate humiliation.<sup>11</sup> Faizunnesa’s text exposes a society where man is acting

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<sup>2</sup> Carlyle, 44–45; also, see Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali in the late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 2–11.

<sup>3</sup> See John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>4</sup> David Rosen, “The Volcano and the Cathedral,” in *Muscular Christianity*, ed. Donald Hall (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 22–34.

<sup>5</sup> Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 41.

<sup>6</sup> Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: Manly English Man and the Effeminate Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>7</sup> James Mill, quoted in Sinha, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Macaulay, quoted in Sinha, 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. Sinha mentions that Bengali Muslims, along with the Hindus of lower castes, were exempted.

<sup>10</sup> Muslims in colonial India saw England as the usurper and abstained from being an active part of the new society. They also were late to join the social reformist movement of the *Brahmo Samaj* because of their general distrust of both the reformed Hindus and Christians missionaries for fear of losing religious identity. See Eaton, ed. *India’s Islamic Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); Ahmed, ed. *Understanding Bengal Muslims*; Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*.

<sup>11</sup> Alter, “Celibacy, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Gender into Nationalism in

as a protector and proprietor of society and its female subjects. It is a man's duty in *Rupjalal* to prove his valor by defending the moral and domestic order. A man's life is thus put to various tests, and only the righteous and assertive ones come out as heroes. At the other extremes are the deviants who are either monstrously evil or pitifully effeminate in nature. The masculine characters are put in charge of the vulnerable, the oppressed, and the females, and to practice /assert this authority, they constantly cause the oppressors to cower away.

The Islamic discourse on manliness in colonial Bengal developed from the interpretation of *Sharia* (the canonical law of Islam, or the Divine Law as it was recorded in the Koran and interpreted by the prophet), the *fiqh* (a specific interpretation and application of laws deduced from the *sharia*),<sup>12</sup> *Hadith* (collected words and conducts of the prophet, his approval of certain deeds),<sup>13</sup> and from interpretation of *Hadith* by Al-Ghazali, Imam Bukhari, and many other scholars of the Perso-Arabic world. Ghazali's *The Revivification of the Religious Sciences*<sup>14</sup> played a dominant role in formulating the discourse of masculine dominance in Islam.<sup>15</sup> Faizunnesa assimilates in her text a pan-Islamic discourse of masculine domination. She narrates the tale of a masculine hero who confronts physical, spiritual, and moral dangers and successfully proves his ability to become a powerful administrator; his power is epitomized through his control over his two wives. He confronts and defeats the monstrous male opponents, helps the weak males regain their power, and establishes himself as a manly hero. The righteous, the monstrous, and the effeminate males deploy their own schemes to court, win, or control their domestic or social situations. In the end, only the assertive males succeed to attain power and success. These males prove their masculine vigor as they uphold their moral and social order by succeeding in controlling their women.

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Northern India," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 53:1 (Feb. 1994), 45–66. Also see Michael Fisher, "Women and the Feminine in the Court and High Culture of Awadh, 1722–1856," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. Hambly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> *Sharia* is God-given law while *fiqh* is the concrete legislation. See Anne Roald, *Women in Islam: The Western Experience* (London: Routledge, 2001), 100–109.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>14</sup> The book, originally written in Persian in around the 12th century, was translated into Bengali in the 1890s. However, the Persian version or Urdu interpretation of the text was available in any upper-class Muslim household.

<sup>15</sup> The Koran describes that God created mankind "out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate" (7:189). The verse has been interpreted as the indication of man's power over the [female] mate. Since man was created first, he is the soul, and his sexual mate is the body and thus is subordinate to that entity. See Roald, 120.

Jalal is taught to be masculine from the very beginning of the story. Prince Jalal's mother takes extra care of his physical and intellectual growth. Faizunnesa describes:

She also wanted to see her son  
Accomplish what his father had done  
As a good king, and as a man of honor.  
So, when the little prince turned four,  
The Queen Mother appointed for him  
The best of teachers one could find.  
She wanted him to learn everything,  
About every field of learning.  
So, Prince Jalal learned to discern  
The words of *Torah*, *Zaboor*, *Bible* and *Koran*.  
He learned languages—Urdu and Persian,  
A philosopher he was, and a mathematician.  
He learned logic and literature well;  
In short, he became very knowledgeable. (49)<sup>16</sup>

It should be noticed that the queen gives emphasis on (all) religions, languages (Urdu and Persian), mathematics, philosophy, and literature. The young prince is trained to be athletic and strong. His physical beauty plays an important role in defining his masculine valor. Faizunnesa notes in the same stanza: "The dazzling charm of his manliness/Turned the meekest housewives into temptresses/As they all longed to be/Immersed in the vigor of his masculinity."

Even though Hinduism as a religion is not mentioned in Jalal's curriculum, the impact of Hindu religion and culture is portrayed throughout the text. The Hindu male figures that are frequently mentioned in the text are usually associated with masculine sexual and physical strength. Ravana (the abductor of Sita) and Krishna (the lover of Radha) play dominant roles as they symbolize masculine physical strength and sexual threat respectively. The virtuous male characters of Hindu mythology are, however, never mentioned. Jalal's love for Rup is compared to Krishna's love for Radha; at the same time, Fortas the giant is constantly compared to Ravana. But Faizunnesa never makes a comparison between Jalal and Rama.<sup>17</sup> Jalal refers to the Hindu myths and legends more frequently than he does Islamic culture. At the same

<sup>16</sup> See my translation of *Rupjalal*.

<sup>17</sup> Rama and his brother Laxman rescued Sita from Ravana's palace with the help of Hanuman. When Sita's chastity was questioned, Rama did not stop Sita from taking the *agnipariksha* (the fire test in which Sita was to walk through fire and come out unharmed). See Williams, *A Handbook of Hindu Mythology*, 243.

time, he is taught the two languages prominent in an upper class Muslim household.<sup>18</sup> Muslims in India did not consider either Bengali or Hindi a suitable language for them. As a result, Muslims in Northern India and West Pakistan adhered to Persian and Urdu.<sup>19</sup> In the Muslim provinces of Bengal, on the other hand, Muslim peasants and the laboring class spoke Bengali. The upper class (known as *ashraf*) Muslims preferred to speak and learn Persian and Urdu and, sometimes, Arabic.<sup>20</sup> So it was only proper for Faizunnesa's Prince to learn those "Islamic" languages.<sup>21</sup> His physical beauty is another important factor in the text. He has the power to transform the "meekest housewives into temptresses," and he seems to attract women of all ages. But the narrator makes it clear that this prince does not abuse his sexual power. She portrays for us a picture of a masculine hero, awarding him with the intellectual, spiritual, and physical strength to be able to become a powerful agent of moral courage, athleticism, stoicism, and sexual purity.

Jalal's valor is the main theme in Faizunnesa's text. She starts the tale from the very start, when a happy queen and a powerful king are preparing to fulfill their happiness with a perfect heir. Faizunnesa notes the birth of her hero and his preparation and training before she allows the prince to set out for adventures in the real world. The reason for Jalal's adventure is also related to his masculine desire. He needs a perfect sexual mate to be able to prove his manhood. As a courageous man, he then takes control of the situation when the royal ministers and the queen mother fail to arrange his marriage with the perfect

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<sup>18</sup> Urdu was a state language in the Muslim dominated region of northern India. Hindi gained the same status in 1900. In Bengal, the British replaced Bengali with Persian as a state language in 1835. Thus, Bengali Muslims learned Persian along with Urdu and the vernacular language. Muslim leaders in Bengal emphasized on the importance of Urdu because of the fact that it gave them access to religious books which were translated into Urdu from Arabic. See Lateef, 35–42.

<sup>19</sup> See Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community*, Lateef, *Muslim Women in India*, and Minault, *Secluded Scholar*, for a discussion on different languages and their impacts on religions in colonial India.

<sup>20</sup> See Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*; also, see Minault, *Secluded Scholar*, and Amin, *The World of Muslim women*, and Eaton, ed. *India's Islamic Tradition*.

<sup>21</sup> In her preface, Faizunnesa mentions that she also learnt Urdu and Persian from her house tutor; needless to mention, it was quite rebellious for a Muslim woman to be able to read during that time. For background information on the Muslim woman's education, see Minault, *Secluded Scholar*, Amin, *The World of Muslim Woman*; Ali, *The Emergence of Feminism Among Indian Muslim Women*, and Lateef, *Muslim Women in India*.

bride. Hunting, a royal and masculine sport, becomes Jalal's symbolic excuse to begin his journey:

He then made his plan  
 To make a journey to the farthest land  
 With the intention of hunting deer.  
 All realized what he wanted to hunt down  
 Was not a deer, but a doe-eyed woman. (51)

The symbolic pursuit eventually becomes a real one as he has to hunt for the captor of his beloved; thus, hunting becomes the ultimate test for Jalal to assert his masculinity.

Jalal's "manful assertions" are structured around the ideologies of social and political dominance. As a prince, he is expected, and prepared as well, to be adventurous and brave. According to the universal fairy tale format, he is also required to save a distressed damsel. He has social and political authority and he uses it by promising to rescue his beloved from the hands of an oppressor. Throughout the text, he asserts his prowess by defending the weak. He stands for the righteous and advocates peace and harmony. He proves his manliness by keeping his promises. His heroic nature often diverts him from his actual mission and delays him from returning to his lover even after his mission is accomplished. He lives in a man's world, a world full of action and adventure. In this world, a masculine hero always faces the dangers of carnal temptations, and sometimes he has to surrender only to emerge as victorious. Jalal therefore remains, or rather becomes, a braver hero through his adventures, resistance, and surrender to sexual temptations.

Jalal's position as a masculine hero is either valorized or tested. The first test comes when he sets out to kill Fortas the giant and becomes the prisoner of Gulchehra, a fairy princess. Even though Jalal displays his dignity by refusing to be Gulchehra's sexual partner, he eventually surrenders to her in order to save his own life. At the end of that episode, Jalal is thrown into the sea. He, however, manages to save himself and repents his sin,<sup>22</sup> which initially brings him help from a supernatural agent. The repentant man thus receives grace and magical power and regenerates as a hero.<sup>23</sup> His second test comes right after he kills Fortas the giant. He is again taken prisoner, and gains

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<sup>22</sup> Jalal asks himself in his lament, "Why should Lord Almighty punish me/ If I am not guilty?" Here he acknowledges his sexual relationship with the fairy princess as his sin. See my translation, 165.

<sup>23</sup> See part 5 of my translation.

freedom only after he agrees to marry the daughter of his captor, King Zamzam.

Interestingly, Jalal's stoicism, along with divine intervention, helps him resolve this problem in this case:

Gravely Khaza Khizir then said,  
 "I cannot amend what you were reluctant to keep. Yet  
 I can assure that God does what He thinks is the best  
 For us. You are destined to marry this princess."  
 .....

Jalal realized  
 that he was destiny's slave; he decided to abide  
 By the laws of fate. (121)

Jalal attempts to retain his promise to Rupbanu by not consummating his marriage with Princess Hurbanu. His failure to keep promises and marital vows are reprimanded through his chivalrous efforts to help kings, princes, ogres, and giants in need.

If Muslim women are the "symbol of disorder," the "living representative of the dangers of sexuality and its rampant disruptive potential," then the males have to correct this disorder and control the uncontrollable by sexually satisfying women in order to save what Mernissi calls a (male) civilization and (male) humanity.<sup>24</sup> The episode where Jalal is imprisoned by the fairy princess best illustrates this issue. The fairy princess threatens to kill Jalal unless he satisfies her sexual desire:

'How dare you defy my whim?  
 I tell you now dear human prince,  
 You have no power to escape me.  
 Hear me now, and hear me clear:  
 You are my prisoner here.  
 You have no power to escape me  
 So, stay for a while and make me happy.'  
 .....

He planned to play the role of a lover.  
 He declared that he belonged to her. (108)

In another incident, Jalal becomes sexually involved with an attendant of another fairy princess, hoping to escape, with her help, from the harem of the princess. Yet, the same man would refuse to consummate his marriage with his first wife to honor his promise to his lover; he consummates his first marriage only after he marries his beloved

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<sup>24</sup> Mernissi, 13-14.

Rupbanu. In all cases, he is using his masculine power to keep the disorder in control.

In *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*, Charu Gupta argues that women in “India were hysterically protected as guardians of race.”<sup>25</sup> The protective anxiety led colonial men into obsession with this notion of other—the other that violates a race by taking over its women. Though her argument concentrates on the Hindu-Muslim relations in Northern India during the colonial period, it can also be used in connection with the mentality of men in colonial Bengal. In that context, *Rupjalal* becomes a narrative that subverts what Gupta calls “the rhetoric of homogeneity”<sup>26</sup> through its illustration of romance, abduction, elopement, and sexual promiscuity. The hero and many other male characters in the story share this “hysterical anxiety” concerning their women, which leads them to carry out adventures and wars. Take, for example, Jalal’s quest for Fortas the giant. Fortas, the abductor, is a giant—the primitive or dangerous other. It is Jalal’s manly responsibility to rescue an innocent woman from the hand of the demon, and he establishes his manliness by killing Fortas. Rupbanu’s abduction is also a consequence of her father’s anxiety over her safety. He takes his daughter with him on his voyage, fearing that she would be harmed if she is left behind. By taking her with him, Merchant Omar initiates the process of abduction, and he eventually dies at the hand of the abductor. The most prominent defender “of the masculinist faith in the ideology of protective anxiety”<sup>27</sup> is King Zamzam, who also wants to kill Fortas for abducting his elder daughter. Zamzam fails to kill the abductor, but in a hysteric rage, he rescues the daughter only to kill her. He justifies his act by advocating racial purity, along with patriarchal dominance, which convinces him to destroy other possible causes of anxiety, namely, his wife and the younger daughter:

It takes an evil woman  
To bring up such evil children.  
Kill he must the evil breeder.  
He must not spare the life of the other  
Daughter, who still was chaste  
By mere chance. (85)

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<sup>25</sup> Gupta, 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

Even though his anger is eventually subdued by his wife's rebuke and daughter's plea, King Zamzam remains ferociously protective until he finds a proper match for the daughter. When he meets Prince Jalal and hears his heroic tales, he proposes Jalal to be the husband and protector of his daughter (and of his reputation as well).

The notion of masculinity is built in opposition to the other. The other in the text is lustful, ferocious, and foreign. For Prince Jalal, Merchant Omar, and King Zamzam, this other appears as a giant. Fortas is represented as a beast, a primitive threat to chastity and purity. In opposition, the three men represent the patriarchal authority of morality and social justice. Jalal's desire for Rupbanu is manly and acceptable because he is not motivated by lust or impulse, whereas Fortas the giant's desire is nothing but an aggressive physical attraction of the foreign male intruders for the virginity of the native land. For the protective masculine authority, such attraction poses a threat and therefore must be eradicated.

However, the other is not always represented as a force of evil; he can also be a friendly companion or an accomplice in diplomatic affairs. The representation of the other as both the agent of oppression and that of peaceful coexistence resembles the political framework of nineteenth century Bengal: for the Hindu Patriarch in colonial India, this friendly other was the British, while Muslim men were rapists or abductors; for the Muslims, the friendly other existed in the pan-Islamic culture, and both the British and the Hindu patriarch were the oppositional other. In the text, there are characters like the giant King Aardbel who abducts a Persian princess and lives a happy marital life. Aardbel also acknowledges Jalal's bravery and offers his fatherly affection. However, there are mainly two basic differences between Fortas and Aardbel: one is that the latter is more human and loving. His lust for the Persian princess transforms into love, and he remains faithful to his wife. The other difference is that Aardbel is a competent ruler. He is strong but modest, powerful yet vulnerable, beastly yet compassionate. In short he is human in his strength and weakness, and Jalal accepts him as an equal comrade. Aardbel never intrudes or invades other lands; he stays within his territory. Fortas, on the other hand, constantly invades territories and threatens to destroy lives; Fortas is the unwanted aggressive foreign invader in the text who tries to violate social order; Aardbel is the other friendly power.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Gupta, 9. For a detailed discussion on the communal relationship, see Eaton,

The structural pattern of the story is based on the cross matching of the two groups (monstrous and human) of men and women. The aggressive monsters/men kidnap, or forcefully marry helpless women, while the aggressive women chase after masculine men who are facing dangers to save their helpless lovers. At the end, structural balance is attained through the union of passion and the compliance of submissive women with their rescuer/savior men. In the story, characters are portrayed either as sexually aggressive or passive. Sexually aggressive behavior is represented in terms of monstrosity. The male giants and ogres are always seen chasing beautiful and timid human females. At the same time, timid human males are hunted and imprisoned by fairies, ogres, and other non-human female species. The male characters are mostly libidinous. The aggressive men, monsters, or giants in the story can represent on one level the demonized (male) intruder/other that constantly threatens to demolish the racial/ethnic boundary of a superior race by gaining control over its women.<sup>29</sup> On another level, they can represent the inherent aggressiveness in men that enable them to hunt and control women. The giants or the ‘primitive others’ in *Rupjalal* capture, marry, or at least intend to marry women of high social status. Fortas, the giant, for example, captures Princess Nurbanu before kidnapping Rup. Aardbel, the King of demons forcefully marries a Persian Princess. While the former fails to fulfill his desire, the latter begets a superhuman son through the cross-racial marriage. The main plot of a love-struck prince’s bravery to save the captive maiden is connected with the numerous subplots where Jalal becomes the sexual prey of aggressive female species. In such situations, the male prey has to sexually satisfy the aggressive female in order to avoid the chaos and disaster she might invoke; hence the justification of his libidinous acts.

This structure, however, reconfirms the fact that *Rupjalal* works as a critique of masculine dominance in a colonial/Muslim social context. Man is the source and protector of power here. Faizunnessa’s hero and his comrades, or even his enemies, are always displaying their valor in order to protect or promote their own “imagined communities” of manhood, and in the scenario women appear as the “agent of violence.”<sup>30</sup> For Fortas, the women he abducts are to blame as they

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ed. *India’s Islamic Traditions*; Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*; and, Waseem, ed. *On Becoming an Indian Muslim* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> See Gupta, 7–10.

<sup>30</sup> Gupta, 237.

provoke him by arousing sexual desire in him. After the abduction, when he fails to win Nurbanu's heart, he blames her for stirring chaos in his life:

Man is just a fish on a hook;  
 She catches him with an alluring look,  
 Then keeps him as long as she pleases.  
 He thus suffers to give her peace. (77)

Clearly, this is a counter-narrative of masculine ideology as Faizunnesa allows her villain to justify his position as a male victim at the hands of "powerful" women. A man as monstrous, divine, or heroic as he might be, he is always a victim of women's cruelty. Fortas' peace is destroyed and he has to abduct his destroyer; he does not rape them (because he is the victim); instead, he waits for his destroyer to take pity on him. King Zamzam is also a victim as his authority as a patriarch (both in his domestic and political sphere) is jeopardized. He has to murder his own daughter in order to uphold social order. King Aardbel also falls a victim to women's cunning as he fails to save his son from the dangerous spell of a fairy princess. There are many other incidents in the narrative where men are passive victims at the hand of oppressing females. In all of the cases, the passive male victims attain glory because of their passivity. Jalal epitomizes this category and asserts his "manful" vigor through passivity (in relation to women) and through active roles (in the masculine world of adventure) as a hero. He satisfies sexual desires of his female abductors and their accomplices only to attain his freedom; he refuses to have sexual consummation with his first wife until he fulfills his previous vow. A passive man then succeeds in manipulating his first love (who becomes his second wife) and his first wife to live peacefully with him at the end of the tale. This ending is indeed a clever hint at the problematic issue of the supposedly passive victimized role of men in the text.

Paradoxical though it seems, man's passivity then becomes a proof of his masculine assertion in *Rupjalal* and, at this point, the text clearly becomes a counter narrative on the role of the Muslim patriarch in colonial Bengal. Faizunnesa focuses on Muslim man's lustful, possessive, protective, and domineering nature. She has looked at man's role as a son, a husband, a father, a friend, and as a ruler. Take Jalal for example; he has had good parenting. Even though he is single-handedly raised by the queen mother, he has received the proper education to be a perfect ruler. After he is older, he takes control of his own life and only

goes back to his mother to receive formal permission before marrying Rup. As a husband, Jalal exhibits a huge sense of power by appearing vulnerable. He allows his first wife to live in a state of dissatisfaction by refusing to consummate the marriage. This refusal only strengthens his control over his first wife. He also plays the vulnerable role with Rup after their marriage, and manipulates Rup to accept his polygamy. Jalal excels both as a friend and as a ruler. In the second part of the text, Jalal risks his life multiple times to save his friends; he uses his diplomatic skill to avoid war or to seek a truce. He even forms a type of brotherhood with males of various regions (or species) to help these males achieve their goals. As a result, he comes to be a better ruler. He shows his mastery in diplomacy when he subdues an angry wife by saying:

I loved you so much that I could do anything  
 To win you. Marrying Hur was one such incident.  
 I married her to be saved. I was blinded  
 By your love. I had immense greed  
 Only for you. So I slighted every danger,  
 I married her only to return to you, my dear.  
 For you I married her. Without you, my life is barren;  
 I love you, while she is my obligation. (182)

However, the above speech clearly contradicts his reaction when he goes to perform his duty to accept Hur as his wife:

The night they spent in burning passion.  
 It was a night of love, of sensual bliss;  
 So were other nights. King Jalal was happy with his  
 Wife there. He enjoyed every moment.  
 He was happy, and he was content. (183)

However, Jalal's last strain of remorse is seen here as he feels guilty for leaving Rup alone; when he returns home, bringing his first wife with him, he is totally a distant and passive man. By this time he has controlled the element of the rebel in both his wives; hence, both wives accept polygamy as a social practice. It is quite interesting that Faizunnesa's tale ends with its focus on the apparently passive masculine hero, whose mother was happy to have two "wise and pretty" daughters, whose wives nonchalantly "agreed to share/their lives with one husband," and whose subjects "were pleased to have a righteous ruler."

Faizunnesa does not portray Jalal as a father, but she presents us with three very strong father figures in the text. The first one is King Zamzam (who sets up a strict ideology of a father of daughters), who represents the paternal fear and ambition. Merchant Omar also por-

trays the fearful and protective nature of fatherhood (who also does not have a son). The third one, King Aardbell, the father of Prince Digvijay, brings out the disparity of treatment between a son and daughter as he unfolds his endless efforts to create happiness for his son. He even boasts to Jalal of how easily he abducted a Persian princess and brought her to his palace and married her to his son. When he knows about his son's secret love affair, Aardbel attempts to save him from danger and eventually does so with Jalal's help. Faizunnesa then presents us with the second instance of polygamy as Jalal helps Prince Digvijay marry the woman he loves. King Aardbel's wife welcomes both her daughters-in-law, and feels proud to be the mother of a conjugally happy son. Jalal plays the key role in the lives of these three fathers. He initiates polygamy (the incident bears an interesting resemblance to his own marriages) and practices it by marrying the daughters of two other fathers.

The colonial male subject can be heroic in the attempt to protect the guardians of his race<sup>31</sup>—the “inner core of national culture”—in order to protect his identity from annihilation.<sup>32</sup> Depending on his communal identity, his attempt may vary from adulation of woman to his suspicion (or fear) about her sexual power. Through the tales of Jalal and other heroic males in *Rupjalal*, Faizunnesa reveals the strategy that a man in Islamic Bengal used in order to defend his authority. According to Ghazali, a man has to be passive in order to control and satisfy the aggressive sexuality of women.<sup>33</sup> For “to be able to devote his energies to knowledge, a man has to reduce the tension within and without his body, and avoid being distracted by external elements;” needless to say, one of these external elements is a woman. She is “a dangerous distraction,”<sup>34</sup> and “embodiment of destruction, the symbol of disorder.”<sup>35</sup> In *Rupjalal*, men play the roles of aggressive fighters or passive victims with the intention of manipulating and controlling their women. As we see in the text, invasion, abduction, oppression, plundering, patricide, and polygamy are all part of their controlling scheme. If the master narrative of the tale is about man's heroic valor to win his love and about his passive surrender to that love, then

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<sup>31</sup> Gupta, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Chatterjee, 120.

<sup>33</sup> Ghazali, 28, cited in Mernissi, 43.

<sup>34</sup> Mernissi, 41.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

the counter narrative is on man's manipulative strategy of control in Islamic society. If we keep Ghazali in mind, then male passivity in *Rupjalal* is nothing but the reconfirming stimulus of male dominance in the Muslim social context.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the counter narrative in *Rupjalal* corresponds to man's anxiety, considering the protection of his race and reputation (as it is the case with King Zamzam, King Aardbel, and many other male characters in the text), along with his defense of polygamy and infidelity. Passivity is Jalal's strongest device that enables him to attack and control "the disruptive power of female sexuality."<sup>37</sup>

### *Desire, Resistance, and the Female Body*

Faizunnesa's women do not fit into the category of good women created by the Muslim (male) writers of the nineteenth century. Her non-normative writing enables her to draw attention to the suppressed topic in Islamic Bengali Literature, namely female sexual desire.<sup>38</sup> Faizunnesa has presented her evaluation/critique of the Woman question through the portrayal of various categories of women in the text. In *Rupjalal*, the female body is clearly a site of desire and resistance. Throughout the text, one can notice this construction of a woman's gendered position. Silent mothers, obedient wives, and defiant daughters are at the substratum of that construction. They all represent the entrapped position of Muslim women, who had no freedom to express their desires; they were the reproductive force, the symbols of racial purity, and the domestic peace keepers. Mothers in *Rupjalal* "reproduce the social order," wives as "body objects" act as "guardians" of the "corporeal unity" of their husbands playing "the role of she who satisfies need but has no access to desire," and daughters display "a revolutionary potential" through their hysteric demand to "reintroduce the values of

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<sup>36</sup> In the prose section of the text, Faizunnesa makes one direct connection between her text and Muslim social custom. In the Chapter titled "The Seven Brothers," Jalal shares his class prejudice and the racist mentality of the Muslim society of 19th century when he agrees with a character that a woman of a low class cannot be taught dignity, especially if she belongs to a low Hindu caste. See Chapter 5, Book 2 of my translation.

<sup>37</sup> Mernissi, 45.

<sup>38</sup> As I have discussed earlier, male writers of the nineteenth century talked about sexual communion and desire only to educate/advise Muslim men and women. Female characters were portrayed as obedient (object). The discourse of sexuality was obscene in such culture unless the (male) writer's purpose was to give religious advice on such matters.

desire, pain, joy, and the body.”<sup>39</sup> In each category, there are exceptions though; there are examples in the text when a mother questions her position, a wife challenges the corporeal unity of her husband, and a daughter runs hysterical with desire.

The text opens with a happy queen who eventually takes over the throne and her son after the death of her king. The queen mother remains a protector of the social order. She remains the power to whom her son, Prince Jalal, surrenders. Prince Jalal refuses to marry without her permission in one case, and he refuses to consummate his forced marriage without receiving his mother’s blessings first. The queen mother receives Rup as her son’s bride, and then later requests her to accept Hurbanu as a co-wife. She never demands any explanation from her son or rebukes Jalal for his deeds. She only once complains about her fate in the beginning when Jalal falls ill after meeting Rup:

I am young, and life’s spring  
 Still resides in me.  
 But never have I thought to deceive my Love,  
 Not even his memory.  
 Why do you then try to torment  
 Me, by taking away my son?  
 Dear Lord of mine, forgive my sins.  
 Spare the life of the one. (57)

Even this complaint is nothing but a form of surrender to the divine power, as she claims to be rewarded for being a virtuous woman. Her argument is simple: because she has been an obedient wife, she deserves to have a healthy son. Her complaint thus becomes a stereotypical gesture of the values of patriarchal institution. The other two mothers in the text also do not deviate from their duty as protectors; yet, they are persuaded to take the blame in case of their children’s failures. King Zamzam holds his wife responsible for bearing shameless daughters and thus enhancing the ruin of his reputation:

You are devil incarnate.  
 What a clever plan you made  
 To destroy my name! You bore  
 In your womb, some whore  
 Like you. Together you tried to ruin  
 My name. (85)

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<sup>39</sup> Irigaray, “Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order,” in Margaret Whitford, ed. *The Irigaray Reader* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 48–49.

The wife then appeases the angry king by alluding to incidents from the Koran, the Bible, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Ramayana*. In other words, the queen acts as an agent of morality in order to help her husband retain his supreme authority (as a husband, a father, and sovereign power) over social order. The other significant mother figure in the text is King Aardbel's wife, who demonstrates a perfect example of women's role as mothers in the text. She has been abducted by Aardbel from Persia and has accepted a man from foreign land as her husband. She is portrayed as a caring mother of their only son; even the king himself shows his gratitude to his wife for bearing a super-human son for him, and he asks for her advice when he wants to arrange for the prince's marriage with a suitable bride. The queen responds, "Why should I disagree, especially when you are taking a timely decision" (231). In all these incidents, the maternal body is only reiterating patriarchal dominance.

In the text, the daughters' attempts to reintroduce or even conceptualize the thoughts of desire and the body are either rebuked or punished repetitively. The very first instance of desire is introduced in the text through Rup when she regrets missing the opportunity to meet the handsome stranger. She expresses her intense desire and crosses the boundary by being hysterically expressive. Faizunnesa gives elaborate descriptions of her heroine after her first contact with Jalal:

She had lost her wits; and in the dark,  
 She strolled in her garden for hours, alone.  
 Unhappy she was, and forlorn,  
 For she had lost all her dreams.  
 The mad woman's passionate screams  
 Filled the lonely sky with clouds,  
 Like an apparition she moved about.  
 She was not herself anymore;  
 Her coral lips had lost their color,  
 And the lotus face lacked its shimmer.  
 Her youthful body seemed to simmer  
 In the furnace of fervent desire. (62)

The hysteric body which is ablaze with desire faces rebuke from her female guardians, especially from her foster mother who warns her against the mischief of man:

Believe not his words because his sweet words  
 Are nothing but a magical weapon  
 That he uses as a device  
 To capture a pretty woman. (67)

Later in the text, the same guardian keeps reminding Rup of the dangers that such defiant desire may bring. She reminds Rup to think of her reputation, her status, and her blighted future in case she decides to be a degraded woman by eloping with her lover. At the same time, this mother-figure becomes part of that hysterical desire as she allows Rup to lament and wait for Prince Jalal. A male guardian would surely have reacted differently in such a case; for example, the abduction of Nurbanu introduces the element of male authority over female desire. The crime that Nurbanu commits is that she initiates her abduction. In the dead of night, she feels an urge to walk in the garden and decides to follow her impulse; in doing so, she crosses the boundary as she gives more emphasis on her desire than on her social identity as the bearer of a king's reputation and race. Because she prioritizes her own body over the social norm, she is denied physical existence by the patriarchal authority she has defied, even though unintentionally. King Zamzam, the powerful patriarch, thus decides her fate, recasting her in a new role as a virtuous maiden:

He would not allow her to suffer shame  
 And humiliation for her mischief.  
 What she did, he told himself,  
 Was beyond anyone's power to undo.  
 She would be saved and punished too.  
 A virgin princess ran away from the palace  
 With a stranger? Or her lover? She brought disgrace  
 By doing so. Thus she deserved to give up her life  
 So that her reputation would survive—  
 Not as unchaste—but as a virtuous maiden. (80)

The other daughter, Hurbanu, displays total submission to the patriarchal authority and thereby receives the conditional right over her body until her father hands over the total right to her husband.

All the major women characters perform their roles as "body objects" to their husbands' corporeal unity. The wife of King Aardbel accepts her interracial marriage without hesitation and admits to her husband of not having seen any other man besides her father until the abduction. Like Jalal's mother, she also has no problem welcoming her two daughters-in-law; instead, it is King Aardbel who shows concern for the fate of his son's first wife and wants assurance that his son would treat both wives equally well. Prince Digvijay's second wife voices her opinion, saying that she would not mind sharing a husband if she has his love. She points at man's marital right over a woman's body, saying

he has the legal right to claim both of them as his wives, and that they must comply with his decision. She adds, "As a wife, I am obliged to wish well of my husband; therefore, I would not object to your other marriage which came to you as a responsibility. Besides, I fear nothing as long as I have your love" (164). The first wife however is not given any voice, but both these wives undoubtedly reflect a social ideology that demands them to act as body objects for the well being of the patriarchal social order.

Hurbanu is another wife/body object who epitomizes the role of "she who satisfies the need but has no access to desire." Jalal denies her the access by refusing to consummate their marriage. He returns to her only after he is guilt-driven and satisfies his sexual needs per his own wish. Hurbanu, on the other hand, becomes happy to be around her husband; neither does she complain about his absence, nor does she question him about the second marriage, which, as the narrator implies, comes to her as part of Jalal's struggling story of life:

He told her what trouble came across  
As he left her. He told her of his strife.  
He told her the total story of his life.  
Hurbanu's heart ached as she heard his words.  
She felt his pain. She then wiped her tears.  
Now she was happy. Her husband returned. (183)

Like the first wife of Prince Digvijay, Hurbanu accepts polygamy. She remains a silent body and exemplifies for the Islamic patriarch the image of an obedient wife. Her co-wife Rupbanu, on the other hand, is the embodiment of sexuality. The first time she meets Jalal, Rup is sexually aroused, and she is not ashamed of her sexual attraction towards a stranger. When Jalal sets out on his journey, Rup lives in physical torment. She expresses her physical and emotional hunger for her beloved and, after his return, she does not hesitate to respond to Jalal's carnal desire. "I am all yours, do what you please," she tells her lover, and "Two hungry lovers clasped/ Each other desperately" (173).

However, morality prevents Jalal from enjoying the ultimate pleasure and he reminds his hysteric lover of social reality. In other words, Jalal imposes a restraint over Rup's defiant nature and establishes total control over her through marriage and through providing her with a co-wife. Yet, despite his attempt to transform Rup into a body object, Rup remains a silent threat to the patriarchal social structure. Faizunnesa gives Rup the courage to present her body as a subject of desire, and thus voices through Rup her critique on polygamy.

In all possible interpretations, Rup is not what the Muslim or the colonial patriarch imagined its woman to be. In the background of the nationalist movement, she should be asexual (and thus mute); and, according to the Islamic reformist movement, she should be mute simply because she was sexual. The Nationalist patriarch's image of "woman as goddess or mother served to erase her sexuality in the world outside the home."<sup>40</sup> The nationalist ideology thus took away a woman's right over her body by normalizing her as a sexless object. At the other extreme was the Islamic ideology that usurped a woman's right over her body by defining her as a sexual object, hence her vulnerability and defiance. As Mernissi has pointed out, Islam affirms the [chaotic] power of woman's sexuality. A sexually unsatisfied woman can destroy the balance of patriarchal power, and she is therefore a threat. It then becomes a man's duty to satisfy and thus control the desire of the female body.<sup>41</sup> In the scene where Rup is lamenting for Jalal after their accidental first meeting, she is almost on the verge of becoming, or at least representing, the emotion of what the Victorians would call a "fallen woman." Her physical appearance—with unruly hair, "a body ablaze with desire," and her passionate screaming—makes her a demonic spirit. In the same scene, she even agrees to accept the "fallen" position as she decides to elope with her beloved:

I am ready to elope with him anytime.  
I'd rather go and live in sin  
Than have him killed by that fiend.  
.....  
Honor or name, I crave none  
If I can live with my dream-man. (103)

Her "dream-man," however, comes as an epitome of social order and discipline. He vows to rescue her from the Monster in order to claim her as his own. After the victory and many other adventures, Jalal arrives to claim her love. Faizunnesa again shows the boldness of Rup's desire when the lovers meet. Rup is aggressively sexual as she expresses her desire for him:

Pulling Rup towards him Jalal passionately said,  
"You are my poison and my antidote,  
My disease you are, and you are the remedy.  
You wound me, hurt me, and give me malady.

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<sup>40</sup> Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 131.

<sup>41</sup> Mernissi, 53.

The disease that I believe I have,  
 Can be cured only with the touch of your love.  
 Will you cure me with your caress?"  
 Rup softly whispered, "I suffer no less.  
 I am all yours, do what you please."  
 Jalal was happy to hear her words;  
 He placed his lover on his lap and held  
 Her close. The two hungry lovers clasped  
 Each other desperately. (173)

However strong or bold Rup's declaration of love is, it is undercut by her helplessness in a society that runs according to the political and sexual demand of men. In other words, Jalal appears to be the controller of Rup's threatening sexuality. He reminds her of the social and moral justification of desire, which Rup must accept. If Rup's sexuality represents what Mernissi calls "the dangerous symbol of disorder," then Jalal's masculinity is essential to correcting that disorder.<sup>42</sup> She is the victim of male aggression as she becomes the captive of a giant who wants to forcefully marry her. She also becomes the dangerous female, the source of "*fitna*," or social chaos, as she attracts Jalal, the only son and an heir of a kingdom, and pushes him to risk his life to free her from the captor. Her sexual desire for Jalal can also invite chaos as it has the danger of provoking Jalal to engage in socially unacceptable conduct. Such chaotic elements are what Muslim patriarchy wants to control.

Rup's sexuality has been a threat throughout the text. Take for example the twelve stages of her emotion (166–170), where she submerges into and then emerges from nature, implying the natural fluidity of feminine desire. The twelve stages are representative of twelve months (with six seasons, every two months constituting a season) in a Bengali Calendar year. The first two songs—representing the summer season—invoke the desire to consume, as they are full of gustatory images; nature is abundant with juicy fruit and fragrant flowers, and "Nature's fun/ inspires women/ And arouses their desire./They stay in/ with their men/And enjoy sensual pleasure." The fluidity of the monsoon is parallel to women's desire in the third and the fourth songs; the fifth and the sixth songs portray the festivities of the full moon of Autumn, while the next two songs evoke the (sexual) loneliness of late autumn, which eventually leads to the two songs about the dreary cold heart

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 13–14.

of winter. The Bengali Calendar year starts with the Summer season and ends in the Spring festival; the last two songs therefore represent Spring, which stays two months, as a symbol of passion and desire. Rup thus begins and ends her seasonal songs with yearnings for desire as she laments in the last song:

The impact of spring in *Chaitra* is intense.  
 O! Her aroused body is ablaze!  
 Only her lover can soothe her  
 With his sensual caress.  
 Yearning for him increases suffering;  
 My body is a burning flame. (169)

Such defiant sexuality is definitely a threat to the social order that Jalal represents; therefore, Jalal's polygamy must not be considered accidental. As the text's happy ending indicates, with polygamy, Jalal achieves his success in controlling her sexual appetite. However, if Indian Feminism can be defined as "a theory and practice based on presenting a challenge to the subordination of women in society and attempting to redress the balance of power between the sexes,"<sup>43</sup> then Rup definitely stands out as a rebellious character. Throughout the text she has presented herself as a challenge, from being a socially aware heroine and a sexually aroused lover, to a politically conscious woman, aware of her inevitable entrapment in a polygamous marriage. Historical studies<sup>44</sup> proved that nineteenth century Bengal was indeed obsessive in its attempt of recasting women as passive receivers of the benefits of political, social and cultural reformations; simultaneously, the same historical studies unfolded the truth that, while being recast, "women were also recasting themselves" by contesting patriarchal discourses on womanhood and by creating "roles for themselves that often differed from male perceptions and aspirations for them."<sup>45</sup> In this respect, even though Rup's "subsumed and sidelined" defiance seems to go in favor "of the theme of the constitution and reconstitution of patriarchy," her very attempt to speak/communicate with the authorial institution vis-à-vis her husband is in itself a symbol of disruption. Thus, by exhibiting "consciousness of injustice towards women as a group either by men

<sup>43</sup> See Anagol, *The Emergence of Feminism in India, 1850–1920* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishers, 2005), 13.

<sup>44</sup> My summation is based on the research done by critics such as Partha Chatterjee, Geraldine Forbes, Meredith Borthwick, Rafiuddin Ahmed, Ghulam Murshid, Sonia Amin, Dagmer Engels, Gail Minault, and Shahida Lateef, among others.

<sup>45</sup> Anagol, 6.

and/or other women, religion, or by customs,”<sup>46</sup> Rup recasts herself as a conscious female agency of resistance before becoming muted by patriarchal discourse of power.

*The [Silenced] Female Voice in Rupjalal*

Despite the dominance of male authority, there are some incidents in the text that encourage a reader not to interpret the text as a narrative on the subjugation of women. These incidents record women’s resistance and thus question the validity of the absolutism concerning male dominance in colonial (Muslim) Bengal. The text is a critique of the Muslim patriarch’s obsessive attempt to silence the female voice as much as it is a counter narrative of masculine dominance. From the beginning till the end, these two themes remain constant. The supposedly happy ending with a successful king in a happy polygamous relationship thus becomes the woman writer’s derisive evaluation on a system that imposes its own definition of any given subject on the [female] other.

The dangers that female characters face in *Rupjalal* result from some form of defiance of social custom. The customs that these characters break are: seclusion, obedience, self-negation, and unquestionable submission to male authority. As a root of *fitna*, a woman is a dangerous, sexed subject and needs to be in seclusion, under protective custody. A father, in Islamic context, is a caretaker of a female property that he should hand over to a (socially and ethically) competent husband. Even though Islamic law specifies women’s rights over property, and of consent to marriage and divorce, reality kept women and their rights in two different worlds.<sup>47</sup> In a sense, Faizunnesa’s life was not part of the reality that she observed around her. She made use of Islamic Law in her life by filing a lawsuit demanding the alimony that a husband is required to pay in case of the separation; she refused to share her marital life with her husband’s first wife and had made the husband sign a prenuptial agreement, which again went against any known tra-

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>47</sup> For discussions on women’s rights in Islam, see Roald, *Women in Islam*; Hambly, *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*; Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); and, DeSouja, ed. *Purdah* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

dition in a Muslim family during that time. She also had her rights over maternal and paternal property and received her share from her husband's property as well. In contrast, the world she portrays in *Rupjalal* is too realistic; in this world, women do not have (or do not show) any awareness of having any rights concerning their property or marriage. Men are offered dowry along with the bride. Men do not feel obliged to explain their adultery or polygamy to the first wife's parents. No one asks questions about the loss of the rights of women; if any one does, she is silenced.

The act of disregarding the restriction of seclusion or *purdah* brings the tragic consequence in Nurbanu's life. She experiences a sudden impulse "to visit the garden in the dark" and becomes an easy target of abduction. Nurbanu's physical gesture or movement is taken as a form of rebellion against patriarchy; hence she is given the punishment of ultimate silence. On the other hand, her sister Hurbanu gains her chance to live by giving up her right over her own body. She reasons with her father in the following way:

Kill me too  
If you think, as my life-giver,  
You own the power to be the savior  
Of my soul. I don't regret that I,  
So young and innocent, have to die  
With a shame that is not even my own.  
But a king like you, who is always known  
For wisdom and judgment, should not be blind  
With so much rage to commit the crime  
For which a father is eternally damned. (87)

She has a very strong voice at this point as she pleads for her life in front of an enraged father who comes to kill her to shun her chance of instigating chaos with her physical beauty. Hurbanu skillfully makes a logical plea bargain, reminding him of his social obligations:

Think of Mother who will have no child left;  
Think of my sister whom you have killed  
For a crime she did not commit;  
And think of your people; they who would blame the king  
For shedding blood of his own offspring.  
So, think, dear father, before you now act.  
Don't punish me for a sin I haven't committed. (87)

This plain and simple speech is very powerful as it points out for the male authority his responsibilities towards his family and society. Hurbanu focuses on the issues of offspring (if she is killed, the king

will have no child left), of political reputation (the infamy of a king for killing his own children), of his crime (that he has killed his eldest daughter simply because she has drawn the sexual attention of a giant who then kidnaps her with the intention to marry), and of personal judgment (that the father does not have any valid reason to kill her either). Her powerful speech moves the king and he realizes his fault. Thus, a powerful king who comes with an intention of hunting down enemies of his reputation eventually surrenders to a female voice.

Yet in the same speech, Hurbanu leaves her fate to be decided by her father (and his conscience), which in a way flatters the egoist patriarch who consequently allows her to live in flawless restriction. This submission to the patriarchal authority however demands a complete silence; as a result, after delivering one of the strongest comments on social justice, morality, and the patriarch's obligation to them, Hurbanu loses her voice. She accepts the marriage that her father has arranged for her with Jalal; she is Jalal's moral obligation and has no complaint against the man who has not shown her proper respect until the very end of the text. She later makes no comment when Jalal tells her of his second marriage. She can only lament to her attendants when her husband leaves without consummating their marriage, or when her husband fails to return to her. At the end, she joins Rup to create a happy abode to keep the "corporeal unity" of their husband intact.

The heroine, Rup, has written three very strong letters to her beloved, spoken her mind freely to her attendants and to her nurse, and has expressed her sexual desire to her beloved by asking him to hasten their marriage. In the first two letters, she presents herself as a damsel in distress waiting to be saved by her hero; the last letter comes as a threat, in that Rup seems to have realized the meaning of masculine heroism in a specific social context when it rotates around [social and/or domestic] power. She wants to know the reason of his delay, and then she throws possible reasons by asking him various questions:

O, cruel lover,  
 Where are you? Who is the woman who has her  
 Influence over you? With whom are you having  
 The sensual fun? You went to destroy my fiend,  
 So long ago. Did you kill him? Are you in danger?  
 If you are alive, then what keeps you wherever you are? (128)

The solution to this problem also comes easily in her letter: since Jalal is the soul, the lover of her two eyes, and since she is the body left behind by the soul, then she will have to destroy the body. Her

attempt to define her identity in terms of her physical existence (a body object, or anchor for the male corporeality) is a direct threat against the masculine obsession with controlling the female body. To resolve the problem, Jalal quickly responds by claiming her defiant body as his own through marriage. The second weapon that Jalal uses to silence his bold lover is the inclusion of the female other as a permanent threat. The co-wife simply poses a challenge to Rup's complete control over male desire. Neither Rup nor the co-wife, Hurbanu, has the right to reclaim her body as both have handed over that right to Jalal.

Faizunnesa allows Rup to speak only once about her entrapped marital situation. She speaks harsh words against polygamy and accepts it not as her individual tragedy, but as a social tragedy that women commonly experience because of men's fickle nature. When Jalal asks for her permission to bring his first wife, Rup feels betrayed, lamenting that she has a deceiver for a husband, and she comments:

It is not you; it's in man's nature.  
 When he attains one woman, he desires another.  
 He worships a woman until he wins her.  
 He enjoys her youth; then his desire  
 For her wanes. His wife may be a heavenly beauty,  
 He would care no more. He would desperately  
 Run for a new youth, his new prey.  
 It is not your fault, therefore, I say. (181)

Here, we hear a disillusioned voice of a woman, who has earlier addressed her lover as "the epitome of virtue and beauty" in one of her letters. In another letter, she has threatened to kill herself if her lover does not return to her. Now she knows that, in reality, a woman does not have any power over men. "I should have thought about it when I had time," she tells herself. The magical spell is broken for her, and now she sees herself in the mirror as a woman, among countless others, defined and refined as a sexed object. Rup stands here as a disillusioned, awakened individual. In fact, her resolution is so strong that Jalal's masculinity seems to lose its assertive role. Rup then completely negates him by refusing to be a part of his justification of polygamy in the name of responsibility:

I refuse to be a part of your guilt. I would  
 Because I love you, I will accept my fate,  
 But one should be true to one's thoughts and words.  
 What could I do if your words of love were false?  
 How would I know if you cared for me or not?  
 I will try to believe what you just said

That you love me most, that I am in your heart.  
 I trusted you, as I trust God.  
 I would believe you if you told  
 Me that this other woman was not love but  
 A moral duty. But I refuse to disregard  
 Ethics and truth, for I know God would hate pretense. (182)

After this defiant speech, Rup becomes silent and plays the role of a submissive wife of a successful king. Hence, from this point on, her act of complicity may be interpreted as silent resistance.

Another powerful female voice is heard when King Zamzam is confronted by his queen. After killing Nurbanu, King Zamzam realizes that mothers are responsible for bearing faulty daughters, and he decides to destroy the mother of his children. He blames his wife for being a bad mother whose daughter has aroused desire in a man. Hearing his complaint, the queen retorts:

“Blame me not,” said the queen.  
 “I was but a container of your seed.  
 I never had the power to decide  
 About what and when you sowed  
 If the seeds were good, I’d bear the fruit,  
 Untarnished and pure.” (85)

It seems that the queen tries to remind the king vis-à-vis the reader of the (Islamic) purpose of sexual desire which “was created solely as a means to entice men to deliver the seed and to put the woman in a situation where she can cultivate it, bringing the two together softly, in order to obtain progeny, as the hunter obtains his game, and this through copulation.”<sup>48</sup> The king’s fear of “*fitna*” of the power of female sexual attraction over men, is thus indicative of a Muslim social order that fears the power of female sexuality and recommends the “subjugation or neutralization” of women for the purpose of retaining male dominance.<sup>49</sup> The daughter’s power to arouse sexual desire in a giant (a symbolic representation of men of other race) becomes a threat for the patriarchal/controlling authority of a ruler who feels threatened to be overpowered by another race of men cultivated through his own daughter. King Zamzam feels satisfied after he succeeds in uprooting the threat by killing the cultivating field. His queen shows clear indication that she is aware of his fear, and therefore does not fear him.

<sup>48</sup> Ghazali, as quoted in Mernissi, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Mernissi, 5.

Instead, she threatens him by saying: “Do not put me through this agony. / Blame yourself; you might have rotten seeds” (85).

The most powerful resistance in the text comes when the author herself attempts to defend women when any of her own characters throws a list of complaints against women. Faizunnesa sometimes defends women as the male characters criticize them for creating problems; there are also incidents when she is warning women in the text against men’s behavior and making significant comments on male-female relationships. This narrative intrusion by the author serves a double purpose; on one level, it destroys the autonomy of masculine authority, and on another, it adds strength to the female voice that is in the process of being silenced.

The masculine glory is first questioned by a woman when Rup’s foster mother tries to reason with Rup after she expresses her love for Jalal. She tries to warn Rup of man’s destructive nature by portraying man as cunning and lustful. The foster mother uses references from Hindu Mythology, especially from the love story of Krishna and Radha, to make her point convincing. Krishna becomes the avatar of male cunning, and Jalal, his perfect follower. As if to give the warning speech more authenticity, Faizunnesa inserts her authoritative voice at the end of the verse by saying:

After hearing her words, Faizun just adds,  
 “Dear moon-faced maiden,  
 If you don’t trust the nurse, believe my words  
 That a man is never a friend.” (57)

This is an interesting intervention of “three women’s texts”<sup>50</sup> that analyze the politics of masculinity: the inexperienced lover is creating an imaginary world of happiness around a prospective male suitor, a mother figure is trying to disillusion her innocent daughter, and the woman writer is deconstructing the myth and the reality about man and is thus passing her ultimate judgment. Rup, however, refuses to share this suspicion until she finds herself entrapped as an object of male desire. In her final rebuttal speech, she regrets not having reasoned with her emotions, and blames herself for blindly trusting Jalal.

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<sup>50</sup> Of course, I am borrowing from the title of Spivak’s phenomenal essay, “Three Women’s Texts and the Critique of Imperialism,” in *Critical Enquiry* 12 (1), 1985; reprinted in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 269–273.

The autonomy of masculine authority is challenged when the narrator intrudes to criticize Fortas as he complains about women's cruelty. Fortas clearly represents the Muslim patriarch who blames its women for all social and personal chaos, while Faizunnesa becomes the voice of a reawakened Muslim woman who refutes the existing patriarch and tries to redefine her identity as a self-conscious individual who is aware of the repression imposed on her by the patriarch. After Fortas abducts Princess Nurbanu, he tries to win her love but constantly fails. He then condemns women for creating troubles in men's life:

A man, like wax, melts  
 In her fire. She breaks and rebuilds  
 Him. He searches for this fiery stream  
 To quench his thirst; then she has power over him.  
 He dies for and without her fire,  
 She lets him suffer with desire.  
 Man is just a fish on a hook;  
 She catches him with an alluring look,  
 Then keeps him as long as she pleases.  
 He thus suffers to give her peace. (77)

Faizunnesa rebukes Fortas vis-à-vis all men with the following words:

Faizun says: why blame all women?  
 Of course there are some who are to condemn.  
 But the rest of women have solid rock hearts  
 That man can never tear apart  
 And give her a bad name and shame.  
 A good woman does not play the game  
 Of rousing desire in strange men.  
 She loves and cherishes her husband.  
 A good woman's stone-heart is her weapon  
 Against all tricks played by men.  
 It is man who tries to allure her;  
 It is he who appears as a beggar  
 Of love, only to become a plunderer.  
 He makes her unchaste. And he leaves her. (78)

In her speech, Faizunnesa categorizes women into two groups, the fallen and the strong; even though she is condemning the fallen woman, she has not elaborated on the theme of fallen women in her text. Basically, *Rupjalal* portrays three types of women: the submissive ones, the deviants who are taught the bliss of submission, and the different (or foreign) other. Most of the women fall into the first category (Hurbanu exemplifies this group), while quite a few stand out as deviants (Rurbanu for example); the third category consists of non-human (or for-

ein) female characters depicted in the text. These women live beyond the cultural norm of the text until they establish marital contact with human males.<sup>51</sup> Women of this group have sexual freedom and mobility. They travel by themselves, choose their sexual partners, and keep men in their harems.<sup>52</sup> In other words, these women represent other cultures, and hence they unravel possibilities of woman's rights in a restricted social context.

The above quoted sections can be also interpreted as direct confrontation between a Muslim man and a woman regarding the politics of power. Fortas' speech defines man as a victim of woman's sexual power. Man is presented as a passive being, always controlled by almost beastly females. He mentions that a woman creates chaos in a man's life as she burns him with sensual desire; as a result, man is what he is, for he has to satisfy the infinite sexual hunger of the beastly feminine. Woman is the active source of social disorder. Fortas thus gives an interesting summary of Islam's view on male-female relationships, and the narrator's intrusion becomes tremendously important at this point as it is indicative of the existence of a conscious female voice. The female narrator makes direct contact with her female readers as she addresses them directly, warning them against Islamic patriarchy's design to conceal its possessive power with passivity. Faizunnesa reveals women's condition in her contemporary (Muslim) society by pointing at specific issues and situations. In the above quoted lines, she is resisting the male desire to frame woman as a source of chaos and is sending words of caution against that framing. Earlier, she has expressed distrust in man by refusing to accept him as a woman's friend. The narrator's opinion is then shared by her female characters as they show resistance to the framing and express their suspicions about man's decisions.

However, the female resistance is finally replaced with complicity, and her self-conscious voice is silenced. As Mernissi argues, "the power inherent in a woman's divinely decreed inferiority" instigates "disruptive effects" in the Muslim social order, and it therefore needs to be

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<sup>51</sup> When the Glendoveer Princess becomes the second wife of Prince Digvijay, she apologizes for casting a spell on him and promises to be an obedient wife.

<sup>52</sup> Jalal has been a sexual victim as he has been abducted twice by two non-human female characters in the text, and he has to seduce an attendant to escape from a harem. In another incident, he has to comply with the female's desire in order to save his own life.

neutralized.<sup>53</sup> In the preface, Faizunnesa voices her sufferings because of a polygamous relationship and claims that she writes the text to ease her pain. She expresses unconditional love for her husband and blames, not him, but his first wife for her own misfortune. Through her heroine in *Rupjalal*, she attempts to create a happy picture of a polygamous relationship. This time, she allows her heroine to blame the man and her destiny for having a complicated marital life. The co-wife is also presented as a victim in the text. The major male characters, on the other hand, attempt to recast their female companions as sexual partners, accomplices, saviors, or opponent agencies for their own conveniences. The female characters try to defy the masculine attempts of recasting by shifting their roles with power and resistance. As I have already discussed earlier, Rup exemplifies such defiance by articulating individual consciousness; at the same time, Rup also demonstrates the impact of submission to authority by sharing its peaceful result with the people living under the protective power of a king. Earlier in the introduction, I have mentioned Amin's analysis of the formation of a Muslim woman's identity in the light of "an Ayesha or a Fatima." It is interesting to note that Islamic political history identifies Ayesha—the Prophet's third wife—as a symbol of disobedience<sup>54</sup> and "the monstrous image of femininity,"<sup>55</sup> the Prophet's daughter Fatima,<sup>56</sup> on the other hand, was held as an ideal for Muslim women and accepted as a symbolic image of "good mothers, daughters, and housewives."<sup>57</sup> In my introduction, I have also alluded to Amin's argument that the Middle Eastern ideology and the *Brahmo Samaj's* reformist agenda contributed to the formation of a Muslim woman's identity in colonial Bengal. According to this assimilated ideology, a politically conscious Ayesha may point out the social injustice but, in the end, it is a Fatima who should prevail. In this context, my rereading of Rup provokes me to examine her as a symbolic Ayesha who is silenced and thus transformed into a model Fatima, intentionally perfected by a female author

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 4–5.

<sup>54</sup> Ayesha is said to have organized and led a battle against Ali, the fourth Caliph and the Prophet's son-in-law. This confrontation resulted in the division of Muslims into Shia and Sunni. See Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (London: Zed Press, 1996), 93–98.

<sup>55</sup> See Mernissi, 93.

<sup>56</sup> Fatima played no political role either as the prophet's daughter or as a Caliph's wife. Ayesha is believed to have contributed 242 *Hadith*, comprising fifteen percent of the bases of the *sharia*, while Fatima did not contribute at all. See Mernissi, 93–105.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 93.

in order for the Muslim community to regain its lost glory in the colonial history of Bengal.

It is therefore quite logical for Faizunnesa to end her narrative in the following way:

The two wives then agreed to share  
 Their lives with one husband; the King was also happy  
 He loved them both and treated them equally.  
 A happy king and a wise man,  
 He ruled his kingdom with confidence.  
 His people were pleased to have a righteous ruler.  
 They were proud of a King who was just and fair.  
 Thus, in the land of Shimail ruled King Jalal.  
 He ruled with grace and was loved by all. (183)

At the end of the text, the female characters are thus silenced and the female narrator joins them by portraying a picture of a satisfied patriarchal order where polygamy is justified, a manipulative and adulterous king is called “just and fair,” and a kingdom remains proud and happy despite all controversies. Hence, “what emerges from the writing[s], then, is a subtle and closely textured sense of the struggles and counter-struggles through which” Muslim women in colonial Bengal have tried to redefine their place<sup>58</sup> in a society where men constantly attempted to recast them as ideal women “to meet their own needs and that of their class and community.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Tharu & Lalita, *Women's Writing in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995),

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<sup>59</sup> Minault, 62.

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