

Dastangoi: Tales of the Phoenix

Aniruddh Rengarajan

Manav Kambli

Siddhant Kalra

DASTANGOI, 2013-2014

A Compendium

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Contents

Certificate.....	3
List of Group members.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	5
The Saki-Nama: A Fictional Foreword.....	6
Abstract.....	7
Introduction.....	9
Literature Review.....	16
Research Methodology.....	21
History.....	25
The Canon of Dastangoi Literature.....	33
The Ancient Canon.....	33
The Hamzanama – A Total Book?.....	39
The Shadow of an Author.....	43
The Contemporary Canon.....	45
Elements of Dastangoi.....	50
Razm (Warfare).....	54
Bazm (Assembly).....	56
Tilism (Enchantment/Rapture).....	58
Ayyari (Trickery).....	60
Dastan-Rokna.....	62
Delhi: The importance of Location.....	64
Performance.....	67
The Essence Of an Art Form.....	73
On Storytelling Art Forms.....	75
The Spearhead Of Dastangoi.....	79
The Malleability of Dastangoi in context of Art Forms.....	82
The Current Problem.....	86
Conclusion.....	90
Bibliography.....	93
Primary Sources.....	93
Secondary Sources.....	93
Photo Credits.....	98

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Certificate

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report was submitted by the undersigned research team was carried out under my supervision. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

Name of student	Signature
1. Amarnath Duleep	
2. Anirudh Rangarajan	
3. Ashay Deshpande	
4. Gursehej Singh Oberoi	
5. Kruttika Chari	
6. Manav Kambli	
7. Prithi Sridhar	
8. Riya Matthew	
9. Rohit Malladi	
10. Siddhant Kalra	
11. Sujay Iyer	
12. Yash Morjaria	

Name of the Mentor: *Mr. Shishir Nikam*

Date:

Signature:

List of Group members

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Sr. No.	Name of the group member	Designation	Signature
1.	Amarnath Duleep	Photographer+ A/V editor	
2.	Anirudh Rangarajan	Content writer	
3.	Ashay Deshpande	Group Leader	
4.	Gursehej Oberoi	Creativity and design team member	
5.	Kruttika Chari	Accounts team member+ Creativity and design team member	
6.	Manav Kambli	Content writer	
7.	Prithi Sridhar	Creativity and design team member	
8.	Riya Mathew	Public relations incharge	
9.	Rohit Malladi	Logistics team member	
10	Siddhant kalra	Content writer+ A/V editor	
11	Sujay Iyer	Photographer+ A/V editor	
12	Yash Morjaria	Accounts team member+ Logistics team member	

Acknowledgements

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Our heartiest thanks to Dr. Suniti Vadalkar, the chairperson of the Discover India program and her team for investing their time and effort into drafting a splendid program which gave us the opportunity to travel to Delhi and expand our knowledge on the Story telling art forms of our country. We especially thank Professor Viraj Shah and Professor Kunal Ray for their indispensable guidance.

Among the Dastangoi community, we would like to thank Dr. Mehmood Farooqui and his fellow Dastangos, Darian Shahidi, Danish Hussein, Fouzia Dastango, Poonam Girdhani, Ankit Chadha, Manu Sikander, Rana Pratap Sengar and Rajesh Kumar for sharing their knowledge and allowing us to study their skills. We give special thanks to Dr. Arjumand and Abu Baqar Abbad of JNU for sharing their research and insights with us. Without the help of the above mentioned, our understanding of our topic would be incomplete and our newfound love for storytelling would be non-existent.

The Saki-Nama: A Fictional Foreword

To begin our report, we thought that it would be apt to write a little extract of our own, (the names are metaphorical for our team members) in order to follow the vein of similar Dastaans. We do hope this is taken in the spirit of frivolity; and does not necessarily imply that this is some inferential point in our research.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Salutations to the big sleep that comes with midnight revelries. Wine makes an animal out of a man and a man of a boy. The words of the bearer of the fine spirit be praised for his lot in life is indeed sacred and he must protect himself lest he be usurped by the winged beasts of the magician and his misshapen cronies.

Thus our story begins, the 12 brave soul set out on the quest that was to be definitive. In the pursuit of knowledge, they followed the wrinkled old god into the catacombs of the cold and just as they felt their hearts being pierced by the fierce knives of the winter they were saved by a flaming ball of fire, and he spoke: What is it that you desire. For mortals you have strayed far. The first one spoke. They were named so: Baku the Brave, Cookie the Calculative, Bear the Belligerent, Meta the Metaphysical, Guru the Gracious, Parrot the Practical, Mojo the Miraculous, Rudra-Prayag the Radiant, Jamshed the Jolly, Razor the Rambunctious, Anne the Antecedent and Soggu the Soothsayer. They requested the orange-swirly ball of fire to lend them his fire so that they might continue on their quest and promised him part of the treasure that was their ultimate goal. The orange-swirly ball of fire thought for a second and then parted with a lick of his flame and passed it on to the eager group and said that he would wait for them at the mouth of the cave. He did not know the cunning and cut-throat nature of those that he had interacted with. So the group continued. They stalked the god through the maze of tunnels for 9 days and 9 days. Every night they would huddle around the ball of fire and hope that they would not freeze. The prospect of looting the old god seemed so distant and even the thought of their homes and their warm woolen sheets could not keep them warm, but the fire did.

Even in the midst of this desolate situation they felt no fear. To be precise they did not know fear, quite literally. After an agonizing amount of time, they found the lair of the god. It was a thick wooden door and on it was carved a strange symbol that none of them recognized. It was shaped like a star but it moved every time a sentient creature of the green earth came near it. As the fearless fledglings came closer, the door swung open and in a blizzard of hail appeared the god. He was wrinkled no more. He stood tall and proud and glared down at the intruders. He then spoke: You have come for knowledge? All you had to do was ask. Saying so he then pulled out a strand of his hair and placed it in the infantile palms of the group. They opened their mouths to thank him, but instead found themselves outside the cave and once again lucid. They then decided to take their gift of knowledge and apply it to the wide world around them, to reap the benefits, but found that it was now cumbersome to do so. They were all as knowledgeable as the god now, but there was something that came along with the knowledge. They found that they now knew fear.

The truly worthy are touched by the knowledge of the gods. They lie at the mouth of the cave of promises and are fearful of taking the next time and attaining infinity. The irony of the situation is that the entrance to the cave is shrouded by a thick fog. What they do not realize is that the fear in itself is a promise. There is only fear when you know you are close.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

"Know then, that you and all the others have gathered for a long, perilous campaign; know then, that I will transport you from one dimension to the next- and know then, that at the heart of this tale is the craggy path- full of craggy linguistic metaphors strewn with ornate puzzles in words..."

Abstract

The above extract refers to a poor attempt at what is reflective of Dastangoi, or at least the flair of speech in its English equivalent. What, indeed do we refer to when we mention this particular art form is what this report is dedicated to- it is an undertaking, literary and academic. Moreover, it is also reflective of the device known as Oral tradition in the Indian Subcontinent (primarily) or otherwise. This particular report, however, needs certain filters in order to highlight the focus for greater comprehension. This academic report, first and foremost, is centered on the storytelling "art-form" (why this term is problematic is a matter of debate) of Dastangoi- let it be noted, that it is an Urdu Storytelling art form. We attempt to dismantle much of the veil surrounding this particular art form in this report, as it remains much of a riddle as to its history and transition in history. This paper is also comparative in nature. Dastangoi as a storytelling tradition in the past and an art form in the present provides an ample opportunity for comparison. This being said, we will examine the current condition of this tradition with its features. Thirdly, this report also examines the larger corpus of literatures who provide a discourse on Oral tradition, the marginalization of the Urdu language and socio-cultural shift as far as such practices are concerned- trying to be as holistic as possible in its approach.

Temporal frames are extremely important here, as we trace the tradition of Dastangoi from antiquity- concisely speaking, this practice is unique due to it having suffered various truncations in its timeline- making it not an indigenous, time honored tradition practiced in a generational manner. Dastangoi derives its life force from various other components- and this gives rise to a plethora of other questions, all of which we attempt to answer in this report. Implications of revival, reinvention of an art form, what remains and what is carried on are important issues surrounding this discussion.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

For the sake of clarity and comprehensiveness, the report will be divided into sections, as is highlighted in the table of Contents. This report will begin with an overarching discourse on Oral Tradition, followed by an attempt to synthesize the history of the art form. The chapters, for the sake of clarity and later comparison will be alternatively arranged as past-present facets, with the ultimate comparative chapter. Later critical and sociological frameworks will take up the other half of the report. The latter half will also be exclusively devoted to understanding Dastangoi in the contemporary frame- due to its luminal nature- as well as understanding what the implications of such a transition are for an oral-literary tradition are.

These, in effect are the nuances of the report; a comprehensive conclusion will tie up the concepts explored in the paper. Do note that the discourses surrounding concepts like these are extremely fluxing, and perspective based. The hurdles of sifting through source material which hardly proves adequate due to the nature of the sources, the inability of the researcher in understanding core source Urdu material and so on are manifold.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Introduction



Dastangoi Performance, Kala Ghoda Festival.

The purely oral tradition of Dastangoi is a medieval Persian art that can be traced back to the 9th century. The word Dastangoi is an amalgam of two terms from the Persian vocabulary; namely “Dastan” which means “epic” and “goi” which can be translated as “to tell”. In the era of the Persian ‘Dastan’, the sole purpose as identified by Farooqui seems to be the simple observation and retelling of the external world. (Farooqui & Kazim, 2012) In effect, their task was to document and record, moreover, present it to the king, purely from memory. Essentially, it was nowhere close to the ornate storytelling tradition it symbolizes today. Paradoxically, while this would seem like an official designation, Farooqui also claims that essential functionality of Dastangoi was nothing more than to practice the pleasurable art of storytelling as it carried no sanctioned religious or social purpose. (Farooqui & Kazim, 2012) Dastangos or the storytellers used to perform their art in places that generated crowds in the Persian world, most commonly coffee shops but would later progress to performing to audiences that would include royalty in more dignified settings. This tradition of Dastans being narrated in coffee-houses was particularly predominant in the Safavid era. (Pritchett, 1992) The

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

narrative content of the Dastans were initially contained to tales of fantasy medieval romances, and tales full of magic and heroic combat. The character of the heroic, invincible and gallant knight, along with a world of monsters, evil tyrant-like kings, tricksters and the proud, loyal friend- were some motifs seen in the ancient Dastan. (Pritchett, 1992) The contemporary Dastan, however is extremely reflexive, and we have seen it adapt tales which are relevant to the sociological context- tales which observe, document, critique and comment on contemporary societal shifts and phenomena; indeed, the tradition has become extremely vast in scope. In effect, the modern era has seen it expand to accept nearly any theme.

Of the handful of old Dastans that are known, the Hamza narrative is plausibly the oldest and most frequently narrated; originating in the 11th century. The Hamza narrative is structurally elementary compared to the rest of the verse style narratives and is thought have drawn influence from the *Shah Namah* (Book of Kings), another epic in the verse form that was widely held in great reverence by the medieval Persians. *Hamza* was the supposed paternal uncle of the prophet Mohammed, as goes the tale was a hard and fast follower of Islam who was also endowed with extraordinary strength and will. The storylines of the Dastans of the time almost always followed a hero on his journey who would encounter a plethora of interesting characters along the way. Underlying themes would include love, war and the life of the courtly nobility. (Pritchett, 1992)

It was likely that the Hamza narrative was popular in the Indian subcontinent around the time of Mahmud of Ghazna. It is known that its existence in India predated the Mughals and could be as far back as the 8th century when Persian speaking groups began to trickle into Sind in the hopes of a fruitful conquest. By the time the Mughals entered the picture, the Hamza narrative was already popular within the subcontinent. It was the emperor Akbar who took the first big step in establishing Dastangoi as a recognized and celebrated art form in India. Being overly fond of the story of Hamza, Akbar sanctioned

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

having it written and illustrated in a most becoming manner. His text allegedly spanned 12 volumes that were filled with illustrations made by the finest hand. (Farooqui & Kazim, 2012)

Over the few centuries that succeeded Akbar's rule, the Hamza narrative was lengthened considerably through both oral and written means. The written form had grown to occupy 1200 odd pages and was known by the alternate name of *Rumuz-e Hamzah*, loosely translated to "The subtleties of Hamza" by the 18th century. Scholars have varying opinions as concerns the origin of many of these narratives: Case in point, the Hamza narrative is only said to have flourished worldwide till the 1930's, where retellings in coffee houses in Tehran took place, signaling not much of a lull in other areas. (Pritchett, 1992) But by the turn of the 19th century, Persian as a language was rapidly giving way to a multitude of new languages emerging within the subcontinent and along with this wave the demand for Persian texts diminished considerably. The subsequent spread of the narrative was gradual, sluggish even, with only a few Asian languages harboring translations of the tale. This phase also saw what would turn out to be a significant transition in the Dastangoi tradition. That transition being the adaptation in Urdu, the language in which it is practiced in the modern day.

The 16th to 18th centuries saw the upcoming of Urdu as a major language in India, most notably in the Deccan region. The 16th to 18th centuries saw the upcoming of Urdu as a major language in India, most notably in the Deccan region. Not very much is known about the Urdu literature that could bear a correlation to Dastans from this period with the exception of short qissah narratives that were in the form of prose initially, but would later come to encompass the verse format as well. Despite the development of Urdu poetry in the Deccan, it would take a lot longer to seep to the north. This was owing to the lack of literacy in the north and the even smaller minority of Urdu literate population. The 18th century witnessed a mass of the Hamza narrative coming out in print and that too in Persian, not Urdu. The oral tradition of Dastangoi had faded away by this time. (Pritchett. 1992)

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The 19th century brought about with it numerous events that suited the swell of Dastangoi in the subcontinent. In 1800, the Fort William College was established in Calcutta. The function of educating the servants of the British Raj who had newly arrived demanded an amount of literature in various Indian languages among which Urdu was in the inclusion. Texts such as the *Qissah-e cahār darvesh* (Qissah of the Four Dervishes) by Mir Amman, considered by many to be a masterpiece in Urdu prose, were part of the library that the college housed. Another leap in the propagation of Dastangoi was the public narration of Dastans which were written in Urdu during the first half of the 19th century. The *Qissah-khvani bazar* in Peshawar was popular enough to have regular narrations held and it is known that festivals and fairs often included the event of a Dastan narration. The *Jama Masjid* was a venue for nightly narrations in the 1800s. The increasing popularity could majorly be credited to the delivery of the narrations in Urdu which being the commonly known tongue opened up the Dastans to a wider audience. (Pritchett. 1992)

The rise of the oral tradition once again did not leave a trail of printed material. This was because the faculties required for printing on a large scale were all under the charge of the British who would not give allowance for activity that did not directly benefit the Raj. But in the second half of the 19th century, a number of presses flourished under the ownership of Indian entrepreneurs and Dastans began to appear in print. Tales such as Nal Damyanti and qissas such as Qissa-e Meherafroz-o Dilbar were printed many times over. (M.Farooqui, 2011 pp.31)

The print of the Hamza narrative was still uncommon though, with the oral narrative being more popular. Printed material was all in the form of manuscripts, most of what were being painstakingly written down by Dastangos in Rampur, most of whom had come there from Lucknow. The revolt of 1857 which left widespread unrest in its wake had triggered a large migration in the north of the country. Many artists and poets, including Dastangos had chosen Lucknow to be a suitable place to shift to. Lucknow would become a hub for Dastangoi with several performances held regularly at city

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

squares and other public locations. The revolt also saw many printed versions of the Hamza narratives, most of them by the Fort William College. (Dastangoi. 2013)

In 1881, Nawal Kishore gathered the leading Dastangos in Lucknow, aiming to compile all the forms of the Hamza narrative both in print and oral form. When it was completed, it spanned 46 large volumes, each which would measure to be about a thousand pages long and could either be read as a single entity or as a whole. (M.Farooqui, 2011 pp.31)

While the Hamza story was performed and recited in many other parts of the Islamicate world, in places as far away as Morocco and Indonesia, in most other places it was a part of a musical storytelling tradition. Alfred Lord and Milman Parry, in the course of their investigation of the Homeric bardic tradition, studied the Hamza singers of Bosnia and produced a groundbreaking work called 'The Singer of Tales' on the oral tradition. But the narrators they worked with also used musical instruments. The Indian Dastangos, by contrast relied purely on words and their art of narration to tell the story, aligning it closer to literary performance. (M.Farooqui, 2011 pp.31)

For sheer literary virtuosity, for its treatment and range of linguistic tenors, its use of metaphors, similes and all the other conventions of literary and poetic conventions, the Dastan-e Amir Hamza is an outstanding achievement. While it deals with the fantastic, the fantastic is grounded in the real and the social, so it has also been seen as a remarkable social document of the pre-colonial order. While the literary trappings appeal to high-brow minds, the content of the stories, replete as they are with tales of seduction, competitive magical encounters and confrontations between tricksters and magicians could appeal to uninitiated audiences too. (M.Farooqui, 2011 pp.31)

As S. R. Faruqi, among others, has shown, Urdu literary world and its values were recast at the end of the nineteenth century by a group of reformers who looked down on the 'artificial and conceited,' works of Urdu writers. Seeking to yoke literature to social reform and emphasizing purity of thought and

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

simplicity of style, Urdu's leading critics' privileged truthful experience rather than exaggerated inventions. Desirous of mirroring western, more particularly Victorian, literary values they praised moralistic and realistic fiction and long narrative poems. Dastans, by then, were already an object of religious censure, women particularly were advised against reading them because it would corrupt them. At the same time colonial officers often found Dastans to be immoral and obscene. Added to this was the growing contempt of Urdu's own critics who found Dastans to be childish, inconsistent, implausible and too repetitive. The only permissible fictional form for the reformers was the novel and the Dastan was a veritable anti-novel, not a precursor to it but quite a different form. (M.Farooqui, 2011 pp.31)

As anecdotes of Mir Baqar make clear, their performance required an exceptional command over rhetoric, delivery, mimicry, ventriloquism and spontaneous composition. Moreover, Dastangoi was one feature of an oral/performative culture where the public arena was the first and perhaps the most natural site of performance. Qissagors, contortionists, sooth-Sayers, fakirs, magicians, madaris, animal fights, mushairas and sundry other activities provide a prismatic context in which Dastans were composed and performed. Their skill as actors lay in commanding the audience attention at all times, an audience that in the case of a public performance was likely to fritter away at the slightest drop of intensity. This demanded acting and performing skills that range from drama to dance to mime to performance art. Rather than occupying a central place in our artistic heritage therefore, they have been sent to total oblivion. (M.Farooqui, 2011 pp.32)

The third wave of revival of Dastangoi came in the early 2000s spearheaded by Mr. Mehmood Farooqui. The first modern Dastangoi performance was in 2005, held in the India International Auditorium. Farooqui and his group have been performing ever since 2005, usually in colleges, universities and often even at theatres. Their efforts to revive the art have so far been met with a heartening response from all their audiences. They usually narrate verses from the Tilism-e Hoshruha chapter of the Dastan-e Amir

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Hamza. But the subject of modern day Dastangoi performances have become diverse and range from the topic of mobile phones to even the art of Dastangoi itself. (M.Farooqui, 2011 pp.32)

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Literature Review

The focus of the study has been elaborated upon in the previous chapter. Dastangoi, an oral tradition, or as defined, an ornate story telling art form, needs to be evaluated in the light of different frameworks. The primary acknowledgement one needs to make at this juncture is the fact that as far as this topic is concerned, there is not a wealth of literature available, especially that which is directly pertinent to the topic. We may evaluate and assess a wealth of resources as concerns the bare theories of culture change- These are ample in number, but our research focus can be divided into the bare and exhaustive descriptive stage and the analytical stage. As concerns the former, books extensively detailing the tradition of Dastangoi are not available- that area has not been touched upon in a concise, scholarly manner.

When we examine the content of these tales (of paramount importance in a storytelling tradition), most of them have been identified to be from the Tilism-E-Hoshruha. This is effectively the most comprehensive translation which has been compiled by Shehnaz Aijazuddin, who has dabbled intellectually in the Urdu and Hindi Story-telling traditions, lending her work a certain amount of credibility. This is a contemporary piece of literature- and considering the involvement of the Oxford University Press for publishing subsequent, revised editions, one may examine this work in a favorable light. The Hamza-nama, or the Hamza Narrative is one of the richest and vast undertakings in the history of the illustrative and written tradition, revoked multiple times. (Aijazuddin et al., 2009) The first instance is that of Emperor Akbar, who, as records indicate was a patron of this art, and compiled the epic Hamza-nama in a very grand fashion-with cover to cover illustrations and vast detailing of the tale, unfurling as the Dastan was being recited, creating an audio-visual stimulation, and adding another dimension to the storytelling tradition. While this kind of undertaking is no longer as feasible in a mass publishing format, Shehnaz Aijazuddin has compiled them in the written word, and translated it in English for wider access. Early Hamza narrative was said to be chronicled in Persian, and later

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

contemporary Urdu- hence, the implications of translation are simply too stark. This work, however, is relevant to this study, as it provides a clearer look at the content of Dastans- most of the “traditional” Dastans often feature liberal use of the Hamza narrative for their content. The Narrative is essentially features the adventures of Amir Hamza, and the folklore-esque tone is not lost, even in translation. This piece of literature is exhaustive- it covers almost all the tales, resulting in a sizable tome- hence, giving ample opportunities to spot certain trends in the content, and analyze it. However, simply analyzing these would not cover the entirety of the content- contemporary Dastangos use themes and content which is different than this- often adding their own tales, or using other incidents and translating it suitably for the dramatic performance.

The oral tradition, being chronicled into a textual one has immense implications in any culture. The fact that Dastangoi was originally an oral storytelling art form, and the fact that memory has transmuted on paper has certain implications for the “Third Wave” of Dastangos, and this being one of the few sources of literature which is available on the content, also acquires a great degree of importance.

The second book, written and compiled by Mohammed Farooqui and Mohammed Kazim is simply titled “Dastangoi”. This book follows a similar theme to the one mentioned above, but it also adds a veritable amount of contemporary Dastans. Moreover, this book is also instructional in nature- a manual for the contemporary Dastango, if you will. (Farooqui & Kazim, 2012) This is perhaps more pertinent to our study due to the simple comparison of content one can make. It also paints the picture of the art in today's socio-cultural dialectic; indeed, as it is authored by the two foremost authorities associated with the revival of the movement, it promises to be informative, in the very least. One must be careful, however, as the authors may paint a slightly biased picture due to their association with the art- and this may not be a wholly scholarly work. There also exists the problem of directly filtering and translating this book for the study, as it is in Hindi- some material content is bound to be lost.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The lack of sources as concerns journal articles, thesis papers and the like is stark. Academic studies referring to Dastangoi are rare, and in that event, are discussing the cultural diaspora of Delhi and other places where the art used to flourish. News articles, blog entries and the sort do not necessarily constitute to be reliable sources of information, as claims and opinions are often not backed extensively.

There has been some degree of available work as far as the Persian tradition of "Dastans" is concerned. This includes the work of scholars such as Francis Pritchett and John Seyller. Yet other scholars have extensively covered the entire corpus of "oral tradition" as a concept, and contextually speaking, Persian oral tradition. Yet, other articles cast a light on the fate of contemporary vernacular theatre and refer to Dastangoi in that context.

Francis Pritchett, known for her scholarly work on the Dastan and Tilism traditions of Persia, effectively outlines and articulates the themes and motifs in a typical Dastan, while identifying that out of almost all the medieval romances and heroic tales, that of the Hamza-nama is the most famous- in print and otherwise. She uses this particular body of literature (47 odd volumes) as the quintessential example of a Dastan (and rightly so) to highlight the aforementioned themes and motifs. Interestingly, her work is developed on two grounds- examining the Dastan as pure literature, as text which has been orally transmitted (one debates on the vacillating nature of the text- oral, or written?) with plot points and character functionality in focus. The second part of her research deals with the linguistic tradition- transitioning from the Persian to Urdu- and in analyzing that transmission, determining what was lost, what was retained; more importantly, the reasons for retention and loss. This is in lieu with the overarching study examining cultural change, using Dastangoi as the bed in which theory is sunk; moreover, also providing ample material to process texts such as the vast Tilism-e-Hoshruha. Pritchett's work is credible, mostly due to her extensive research on similar topics, such as Ghalib's poetry and her forte in South Asian Islamic studies. She also examines the literature in the institutionalized academic,

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

systematic format; making it easy to filter her work for scholarly references. This, however, is not the extent of her work- She has studied the phenomenon of transliteration, and the tradition of the romantic Persian Dastan coming to India and other countries; also pointing out the contrasts between the oral and literary tradition. Thus far, we can identify her work to be the most pertinent to our research. Her work also opens a wealth of sources for secondary research, such as references to the scholarly works of William Hanaway- with his studies on Persian Dastans.

A recent influx of articles, similarly made available by Pritchett on her extensive site, is the crucial work of Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, also termed as the "T.S Eliot of Urdu criticism". Mehmood Farooqui often cites him as the source, along with Frances Pritchett of the inquiry into Dastangoi. His numerous works include an in-depth understanding into the treatment of the Urdu language in the Indian subcontinent, which includes the examination of its marginalization, its selective emphasis, its nuances and more importantly, its relevance to Dastangoi. Unfortunately, his text most pertinent to Dastangoi is not available as a complete resource in translation. (Ref. Sher, Ghair Sher, Aur Nasr)

Musharraf Ali Farooqui's work is even more paramount. He traces the development of the Hoshruha, along with providing accurate dating for much of the canon of Dastangoi. While his capacity as far as the Hoshruha is concerned exists only as a translator, that too of the master story teller Muhammed Jha, it is more comprehensive than Aijazuddin's, with the flair being replicated in the language.

Secondly, his introduction and preface are extremely informative and exhaustive; even- with a glossary of the characters and their attributes, which greatly helps when one is looking for trends in a tome as massive as the Hoshruha. He also takes ample help from existing scholars, making his academic work credible- S.R. Faruqi, Bilgrami, and Pritchett are but a few names he cites.

Much of the problem of making this a study where secondary research takes a back seat- this is simply not possible in a case such as Dastangoi. This will be explained in the Research Methodology.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

John Seyller, on the other hand, focuses on the storytelling tradition with particular references to the art of Mughal illustration and painting- which seemed to go in tandem, particularly as far as the Hamza-Nama was concerned. While this work directly links the two art forms, we can get his clear preference for analyzing the paintings themselves- research pertaining directly to the study is purely inferential.

There are a plethora of other articles which have been referred to and analyzed in the case of the topics of the essences of Art forms

The facet where literature, especially of this sort is lacking is that directly pertaining to the contemporary Dastangoi tradition, revived in the early 2000's. Due to the obvious temporal constraints binding the publishing of a contemporary study in the matter due to a haze of filters, reviews and journal publication periods, this is an anticipated hurdle. As far as current research is concerned, however, it is hoped that this is a concise review of the material at hand.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Research Methodology

Our research methodology consists of a combination of on-field data collection and analysis of substantial literature to provide some legitimacy. There are a few texts that have been written on the subject of Dastangoi, and they have been discussed in the Literature Review. One of the texts is essentially the holy tome of Dastangos, and this is the Tilism. The other books on the subjects have been written by various members of academics who have taken a shine to the field, and one of them is Mohammad Farooqui, who is widely regarded as the sole reason for the revival of the art form.

Our on-field research will be done within the confines of Delhi, since the city set the stage for the revival and a large number of artists who are involved in this third wave of Dastangoi are based out of Delhi. This third wave consists of Dastangos who function as performers purely due to their keen interest and initiation in the art, hence, our primary sources of information as concerns the observatory, descriptive and analytical aspects will be these individuals. Fortunately, there is an organizational structure which they have, so identifying these individuals has been a fairly easy task. As far as institutionalization is concerned, the IFA (Indian Foundation of the Arts) has taken special interest in furthering the spread of this art form- another agency which we will be approaching for more information. We have been in contact with Mr. Farooqui, and additionally we have also fixed tentative dates with other artists such as Danish Husain, Ankit Chadha, and Poonam Girdhani who have all been active on the scene, so to speak. Since a large part of our research will consist of analysis the current wave of revival, this will be regarded as a primary source of information for us. We plan to extract as much data from these meetings as possible, going into the depths of performance, content, and the intricacies which plague the modern Dastan-go. Looking at the individual and the systemic level, drawing comparisons between the two will be a crucial element in our study. On the historical aspect, literature will provide us with some

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

perspective. This will also allow us to contrast the two waves of revival. As for quantitative information, we plan to attempt to get into interaction with the audience of a Dastangoi performance if that is at all possible, or if this is not possible, we will get in touch with patrons of the art form and attempt to understand the particular socio-economic groups that they come from. If we take it for a fact that Delhi is the focal point of this revival, then we plan to go about analyzing why this is so, apart from the linguistic reasons. Another important part of an Art form is the performance in itself and there are plans to participate in a workshop that is conducted or looked over, at the very least, by one of the eminent Dastangos. While there might not be enough time on field to maybe more than one performance, we will nevertheless try to understand the inner workings of the art form, if we can. This will help us in identifying certain trends as far as contemporary themes, performance techniques et al. are concerned. What this will establish is the particular population set that the art form appeals to, and we will try as best as we can to avoid causal relations, in analyzing these figures, like the black plague.

There might be a number of hurdles that we could face on the journey to the completion of this project, and those could be on-field and literature related. Literary sources are somewhat sparse and quite a large portion of it has in fact been written by those who are involved in the field as of now. The Literature Review illustrates the shortcomings and advantages of the research material at hand. We have established contact with the IFA (Indian Foundation of the Arts) and also Manu Dhingra, who is said to be the manager of the Dastangos and as such could give us a structured look at the revival. An additional factor is that he, too is a Dastango- this tentatively makes him a practitioner as far as subsistence is concerned, and we have not identified many individuals such as this. Another issue which could be addressed is that of the language. Dastangoi dissolves into Persian, contemporary and archaic Urdu, and with the third wave, liberal sprinklings of Hindi and even English. This may make trying to interpret the essence of these Dastans a bit problematic; although, since we will be consulting authorities' familiar with the field, we seek to minimize errors on our part. Linguistic problems seem to

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

be almost virtually non-existent, (although we will acknowledge this hurdle) since the language used in most contemporary performances is Hindi and even a few English words, but if these do crop up, we plan to try to contact a Professor of Urdu from one of the universities of Delhi. This hurdle, post-the research trip was nullified, as many of us could process the Dastans we witnessed; moreover, the Dastangos themselves do not pick Dastans which will be so heavy with the Urdu tongue that the audience is weighed down due to lack of understanding. Moreover, the Dastangos themselves will function as translators due to their familiarity with the text and content; although it will be interesting to note the difference of opinion as regards the essence of the Dastan from Dastango to Dastango, and moreover, Dastango to scholar and finally- Dastango to the modern audience. The audience will be a staple for our research, as the way the contemporary storytelling tradition is received today is crucial- this signals the impact Dastangoi has on the socio-cultural dialectic. The receptivity of the audience has several other factors tied in- ensuring the popularity of the art, its preservation and moreover, its continuity. The relationship between the Dastango and his/her audience will be an important quotient.

Our research will be structured in such a way as to give viewers and readers a view of Dastangoi, while presenting them with various perspectives from literature and our personal experience, which will be enriched somewhat from our visits and discussions. While this study aims to be as comprehensive as possible, it is also to be noted that this will strive to be as academic as possible. Socio-cultural frameworks, and the paradigm of cultural change is what we are directly focusing on when we examine the revival of an art form with a history as varied as this.

Primary research in the form of interviews, no matter how lucid the one who is interviewed is or how erudite can only give us a limited amount of information due to temporal constraints. Dividing equal focus on both, the past and the present attributes of Dastangoi is what we strove to achieve, which leads us to another problem- amongst the Dastangos, there were very few individuals who could provide legitimate, accurate information about the history of the art form. Many were simply

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

practitioners under the tutelage of Mehmood Farooqui, so essentially, much of the sources lay with him- along with his uncle, who we unfortunately could not encounter. Hence, much of the sections dealing with exhaustive details about the art form, its past and the canon of stories it follows has been extensively researched, with a firm footing in the secondary sources. Pritchett and Musharraf Farooqui help us extensively in this regard.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

History

Orality in tradition is as old as language itself and as abundant as the span of human societies, both geographically and temporally (The Simurgh, 120). Speech and language are tools that humans use to communicate thoughts, ideas and emotions. Language is the predetermined set of rules, the mutual understanding of which allows human beings to understand one another. While there are other means of communication through movement and writing, speech is supposedly the oldest and the most perceivable, having been with us since man developed the ability to generate complex sound. The appearance of the Homo erectus circa 1.9 million years ago saw the emergence of the vocal tract, the further evolution of which allows modern human beings to produce complex sounds through the manipulation of air from the respiratory system (Lieberman, 2007, 42). The inception of language came with man's urge to share his experiences with others and express himself through the weight of his words. These experiences expressed through words were meant to put the listener into a stranger's shoes, bringing them closer to experiencing the situation themselves. True skill lay in using language to its optimum and bringing the listener as close to the objective experience as possible. So it was that the art of storytelling was born, initially out of necessity, later out of curiosity for the lives lived by others.

Story telling holds different meaning in different cultures around the world. What may be considered a story in one may not be considered a story in another. Some cultures hold spontaneity and improvisational digressions during the telling in high esteem while others celebrate the story teller's ability to exactly repeat a revered story. Unlike theatre, story tellers create the illusions in the audience's mind rather than generating an image in front of them. Since each individual possesses a distinctive framework of imagination, no two individuals picture the story in the same way. Thus the audience of a story teller become co-creators of the story rather than passive observers. Beyond professional story tellers, everyone is essentially a story teller, co-creating stories with every further interaction (National Storytelling network).

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The earliest distinct oral traditions were probably chants which came into being during work. These chants began to include supernatural characters and evolved into the earliest myths and legends. Those skilled in these myths took the role of entertainers and educators in communities which yet lacked dialects and written records. The respect and high status given to these storytellers is evident through a study of the surviving major oral traditions across the world. The Irish Seanchai, one of the oldest surviving story telling formats comes from a long line of Celtic bards and story tellers in Ireland. The term "Seanchai" is old Irish for "bearer of lore", a respected title given to the custodians and educators of ancient Celtic epics. The Celtic revival movement still continues this tradition into the modern day (McKendry). Another ancient form of the story teller is the West African "Griot", an individual known in the community as a historian and a poet. The respect they commanded often saw them in the roles of advisors and diplomats for the West African rulers as late as the 13th century (Hale). A unique example would be the Jewish oral law, the written form of which was vehemently opposed by the Rabbis of the time. They believed that the continuation of their oral tradition separated their religion from the Christian bible and putting its tenants in writing would undermine the supreme authority of the Torah. The written form of their law would become static and final while its continued orality would mean ensure its development and adjustment for the times (The Simurgh, 120-122).

India has a long history of storytelling. The age old practice of memorising and handing down the Vedaas coupled with the Islamic conventions of orality created a society ideal for the storytelling art. Kaavad, a Rajasthani story telling practice celebrated the epic of the Mahabharata, a story which itself alluded to the importance of storytelling. "Kaavad banchana", its modern incarnation is still flourishing today (Sabnani, 28). Paralleling this is the Sufi story telling art of "Masnavi", composed of tales by the great poet Rumi. These couplets of Rumi's work take the audience into a state of deep self-reflection and philosophical contemplation (Hamid, 28). Kissagoi, an art of narration was extensively studied by the Urdu and Hindi poet Premchand. It is closely tied with Dastangoi employing similar styles of expression but differing in its content and overall framework (Dastangoi Blog). Dastangoi therefore, is a part of the larger world history of storytelling.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The aurality that rests at the core of a storytelling art form such as Dastangoi offers the artists and the propagators of the art form freedom from cumbersome tasks such as documentation and compilation. The focus remains with artistic endeavors rather than with documentation or historiography. While this ensures intra-generational artistic development, it also proves to be quite a disadvantage across generations.

Recording histories of these art forms was at best an auxiliary augmentation to Dastangos of centuries ago. This seeming redundancy of documentation to them is perhaps the primary reason why scholars of today do not have access to an exhaustive history of Dastangoi, along with other storytelling art forms akin to it. This is also the reason why the Dastans accessible today in modern-day publications are often derived from sources that cannot be verified. For instance, in Nawal Kishore's 46,000-page epic compilation of the Hamza Narrative the Dastangos of Lucknow reproduced numerous stories from memory. The authenticity of these stories is impossible to verify because there is no repository domiciling them from antiquity (Context, 32).

However, just as it is the tendency of one generation to overlook the need to document for the next, it is also his tendency to decipher his own self by reflecting upon his roots. By virtue of meticulous scholars and publishers, literature on the art form is not completely non-existent.

This orality has been ascribed several functions in retrospect by students of the past. These functions primarily include the transmission of history, law, ethics and art. It is in the realms of the artistic function of orality that Storytelling art forms like Dastangoi find themselves. Throughout history, there have several orally performed art forms of this kind. There is evidence that unveils a vast plethora of antique storytelling art forms from all over the world and art forms like Dastangoi attest to their protraction to this day. Each of these storytelling art forms spawned from circumstances and milieus that nurtured them and crystallized idiosyncratic elements into the forms. In the case of Dastangoi, this milieu was the Persian Romance Tradition.

Etymological deconstruction tells us that Dastan and Qissah, both in the Persian language translate to "story" or "tale", but this also refers to the narrative genre, which dates back to medieval Iran. This particular genre of storytelling was immensely popular- the date Frances Pritchett provides us with is the 9th Century.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

(The Medieval Persian Romance Tradition, 1) Their tales consisted of the various themes, most particularly the very popular theme of romance and adventure. Subsequently, the tales wove themselves around the gallant, chivalrous prince and his encounter with tyrannical kings, demons, sorcerers, Jinns of the Howling desert, enemy gladiators and champions and demure, peerless princesses- either of the human or the pari (fairy) race. It is also inclusive of the cunning and shadowy agents called aiyyars- whose roles are either supportive or destructive. (The Medieval Persian Romance Tradition, 1)

In this particular dastan tradition, the tales of Hamza, or the Hamza romance is believed by scholars to be the oldest of its kind- taking ample influences from the Shahnameh; this theory is subscribed to by the scholar William Hanaway. If we are to discuss the simplicity of plot and structure, one can adhere to Hanaway's opinion- that it is the most simple. (The Medieval Persian Romance Tradition, 2) The romance of Hamza is the lore of myth and legend. The Hamza romance is said to be indicative of the historical figure, Hamza ibn Abd ul-Muttalib; none other than the paternal uncle of the prophet. Accounts seemingly dictate that Hamza himself was an extremely huge man, whose frame was matched only by his lion hearted courage. He is believed to have died in the Battle of Uhud, and was termed the "Chief of Martyrs" by the Prophet Mohammed. (The Medieval Persian Romance Tradition, 3) Yet another theory propounds that Hamza was not actually the paternal uncle of the prophet, but was termed Hamza Abdullah, a member of some form of a radical Islamic sect, referred to as the Kharijites. He was someone who had led a bloody rebellion against the existing caliph Harun-ur-Rashid, and his successors. His exploits and bloody undertakings are said to have spawned several Dastans to his credit. This is also in the same temporal frame as the 9th century. (The Medieval Persian Romance Tradition, 3) Scholarly speculation dictates that his connection to the prophet may have been a method of acquiring legitimacy. However, this alternative is thought to be circumstantial and the conventional source of Hamzah is the more popularly accepted one.

The Hamza Narrative, in its entirety and also as an addendum to its size spread to many other regions. There are many versions peculiar to each region- The 12th Century Gregorian version and a 15th Century Turkish version which was 24-Volumes long, along with 16th Century Malay, Javanese, Balinese and Sudanese

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

versions. (The Medieval Persian Romance Tradition, 3) The 19th century saw an unprecedented spread of this tradition from Persia to India, equating its own with the classical Shahnameh- said to be performed in "Tehran coffee houses", as Pritchett points out- till the contemporary ear of the 1930s and the 1970s. (The Medieval Persian Romance Tradition, 2)

The Persians came to the Sindh region as military adventurers and had begun to settle down by the 8th century (The Persian Romance Tradition comes to India, 1) and some of them even proceeded to engender dynasties. Inevitably, this political conquest was accompanied by a cultural immigration and thus, the Persian Tradition of Storytelling found itself on Indian soil. Interestingly, of this tradition, it was only the Hamza narrative that managed to acquire any significance in the new land. While it is conjectured that dastans of Hamza were popular since the 8th century itself, the first evidence of it in India seems to be a set of late 15th century paintings illustrating the stories, possibly produced in Jaunpur (Simurgh, 128). There is more reliable information on the Hamza narrative in India during the Mughal Period. In 1555, Babur refers to a leading literary figure of the time having compiled some of the stories, while at the same time making his indifference towards the narrative overt by calling the activity a "waste of time" (The Persian Romance Tradition comes to India, 1) Akbar (1556 – 1605) on the other hand, was of a contradicting opinion. "As Akbar's court chronicler tells us, Hamza's adventures were represented in twelve volumes, and clever painters made the most astonishing illustrations for no less than one thousand and four hundred passages of the story". (The Persian Romance Tradition comes to India, 1) This project was one of the first artistic endeavours commissioned by him and nothing of this magnitude was ever undertaken again. The illustrated compilation came to be referred as the 'Hamzanama'. As mentioned, the compilation lauds about 1400 folios which are at least a yard and a half by a yard in size, with the text inscribed at the back (Simurgh, 128). He himself performed Dastans and supposedly spent a considerable amount of time with his 'durbār' narrator. In 1612, at the court of Sultan Abdullah Qutub Shah of Golconda, a Persian narrator arrived and at the orders of the Sultan, prepared a summary of the Rumuz-e-Hamzah called the Zubdat ur-rumuz (the cream of the Rumuz) (The Persian Romance Tradition comes to India, 2) Throughout subsequent centuries,

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

the Hamza Narrative acquired momentum and even spawned other Indo-Persian art forms like

Bostan-e-Khiyal. In the 19th century, the great Urdu and Persian poet Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869), mentions his delight at receiving “a book of the dastan of Amīr Hamza about 800 to 960 pages long”. (The Persian

Romance Tradition comes to India, 4) It is important to note at this point that the Hamza narrative was flourishing in North India in the Persian language; a language not strictly indigenous to North India. The momentum of the art form was fuelled and sustained by the expanse and currency of the language that it was performed in. “By the nineteenth century, however, Persian as an Indian language was in a slow decline, for its political and cultural place was being taken by the rapidly developing modern languages” (PRT, 5). However, the development of Urdu as a language in the Deccan and the North reinvigorated the threatened momentum of Persian genres. The entire process of the popularization of Urdu as a predominant language included an element which is pivotal to the survival of Dastangoi into the 19th century. This element is the imbibing of Persian culture into the Urdu language.

“From the 16th to the 18th century, Urdu was developing as a literary language” (The Hamza Romance in Urdu, 2). This development possessed an accommodating space within it and consequently, Urdu equipped its core with Persian words, expressions and idioms. More importantly, it also imbibed Persian culture into its artistic array. “Both Urdu poetry and Urdu prose seem to have developed initially in the Deccan, then gradually migrated northwards” (The Hamza Romance in Urdu, 2) However, the growth of Urdu was a slow process because Persian still remained important till late into the 19th century. With the evolution of Urdu, Dastangoi along with other art forms like Shayari and Ghazals began to be translated and performed in Urdu.

There is evidence of Urdu dastans being performed in the first half of the 19th century. A travel book called *A Tour of the Sights* (ca. 1820) documents nightly performances that took place at the Jama Masjid: “On the stairs on the north side in the evening a qissah-khvan (narrator of a qissah or dastan) comes and does qissah-narration” (The Hamza Romance in Urdu, 5). Sir Sayyid Ahemad Khan augments this description in 1847: “In the evening a qissah-khvan arranges a reed stool, sits down, and narrates the dastan of Amir

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Hamza. To one side the qissah (dastan) of Hatim Tai is being told, and somewhere else the dastan

Bostan-e-Khiyal ([The Hamza Romance in Urdu, 5](#)).

By the mid-1800s, Urdu had become more popular than before and people from all classes had begun using it. Thus, dastans had begun to reach the masses of Delhi and the transition from Persian to Urdu at the cusp of the decline of Persian turned out to be a boon for the art form. At some point in the 1830's, a loose distinction between 'dastan' and 'qissah' was acquiring currency. "Dastan" came to be used as a special name for the longer, more elaborate romances, like that of Hamzah, and "qissah" became a residual category of shorter, simpler stories that were more like traditional fairy tales; but this distinction was never absolute. ([The Hamza Romance in Urdu, 6](#)) Dastans in Urdu had become an intrinsic part of the oral tradition of Delhi, but advancements in print were yet to be seen.

"Only in 1858, however, when Munshi Naval Kishor founded his famous Lucknow press, did the real era of dastan publishing begin" ([The Dastan of Amir Hamza in Print, 1](#)). He went on to publish a huge amount of literature on dastans and augmented the canon substantially. These augmentations will be elaborated upon in 'The Canon of Dastangoi Literature' section. However, his greatest contribution to the historical protraction of dastans is his publication of the epic *Dastan-e-Amir Hamza* undertaken in 1881. "He hired Muhammad Husain Jah, Ahmad Husain Qamar, and Tasadduq Husain, who were among the most famous Lucknow dastan-narrators". ([The Dastan of Amir Hamza in Print, 3](#)) The *Dastan-e-Amir Hamza* is a 46-volume, approx. 46,000-page long epic that domiciles a comprehensive repository of Hamza dastans.

Dastangoi thrived till the 1900s with several Dastangos practicing the art form as an occupation. This astonishing treasure-house of romance, which at its best contains some of the finest narrative prose ever written in Urdu, was the delight of its age; many of its volumes were reprinted again and again, well into the twentieth century. ([The Dastan of Amir Hamza in Print, 3](#)) However, with the demise of the last great Dastango, Mir Baqar Ali, the art form perished abruptly. Alternate art forms in Urdu like the novel and poetry completely engulfed the treasury of dastans and suspended Dastangoi into obscurity. Post Mir Baqar Ali's

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

demise, dastans saw an era of neglect and marginalization. He left no known protégés and had no successors. A three minute audio clip is all that survived the decades after his death.

A Columbian scholar called Frances Pritchett chanced upon Dastangoi as a part of her research on Urdu art forms in the 1980s. Shamsur Rahman Farooqui, the great Urdu poet and critic, came in contact with Pritchett and thus began a symbiotic association of research into Dastangoi. Consequently, he found the Volumes of the 'Hamzanama' scattered across the globe with little information about their roots and content. He analysed the stories and discovered the importance of orality in them, deducing the framework of the art form that preceded it. In 2002, S.R Farooqui advised his nephew, Mehmood Farooqui, to delve into the art form to satiate his pre-existing interest in the overarching genre. Mehmood was instantly enchanted by the rich texts and their ingenuity and began his own research into the art form. The crucial impetus for the revival of Dastangoi was Mehmood Farooqui's decision to perform it again for the first time in eight decades. He took this decision believing that the best way to demonstrate the art form was to perform it (Mehmood Farooqui, Interview). Thus, the first modern Dastangoi performance took place on 4th May 2005 at the India International Auditorium. Thenceforth, the revival, spearheaded by Mehmood himself and situated out of Delhi, has only gained momentum and today, an entourage of twenty modern-day Dastangos are committed to propagating and resurrecting the form to its historical pristine status.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The Canon of Dastangoi Literature

The Ancient Canon

Dastangoi, being what it is- to effect, a story telling “art-form” (the loosest definition of an art) and moreover, a transient phenomenon which revolves in the realms of literary and oral tradition, relies heavily on its textual canon. The next logical step is, what is the canon of Dastangoi? Another analytical point to note here is, that the content of Dastans is often what sets Dastangoi as an oral tradition aside from other Urdu storytelling traditions. Hence, understanding and comprehending the canon of Dastangoi is but primal in importance when examining this art form. This discussion in the first subsection strictly refers to Dastans composed and penned before the new wave of reinvention of Dastangoi, in the 2000’s. This is done to simplify the process and avoiding confusion with the influx of the “contemporary” Dastan. Another problem with considering contemporary Dastans is often that of the loose definition of the Dastan- what do new age Dastangos even refer to when they compose a “Dastan” meant for performance? Moreover, are there any essential features to a Dastan? These questions are subsequent in nature. Let us now begin with the discourse on the traditional canon. The word traditional is used for the simple reason that modern Dastangos view these Dastans in a similar vein- the new Dastan is never one from the Hamzanama, a decidedly traditional text. The performances are also strictly classified as such.

When one mentions the Hamzanama, one may call it “the holy tome of Dastangos” (Farooqui, interview) for numerous reasons. What indeed, is the Hamzanama? This text is tackled first because apart from it being a behemoth of a compendium of texts- 48 volumes- there is almost complete overlap with these Dastans being used for performative purposes. The second text which falls in line with this and is often merged with the narrative in the Hamzanama is the Tilism-e-Hoshruha. Considered to be the sequel to the Hamzanama (Aijazuddin, 2009 pp.xiii) this collection of Dastans is also referred to broadly as the Dastan of the

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Tilism-e-Hoshruha. (Aijazuddin, 2009 pp.xiii) Its rise to prominence can be attributed to the special efforts of the Nawal Kishore printing press in 19th Century Delhi, (Aijazuddin, 2009 pp.xiii) similar to Akbar's massive undertaking of the Hamzanama in the 16th Century which lent legitimacy to the Hamzanama being reified and used as the canon for Dastangoi. The implications of a royal undertaking and a literary undertaking are vastly different- one is appropriated by an entity sovereign in every sphere, while the other by an entity which by itself may be an organ of the sovereign or even contradictory to sovereign interests. The fact that it was the colonized era which produced this literature is yet another factor, tying in with the opposition Urdu met when it was marginalized by the Colonizer. Both cases were favorable for Dastangoi- currying favor from the emperor by performing texts considered an elite form of literature was a privilege in itself; on the other hand, the chain reaction set up by the marginalization of Urdu was what gave birth to a renewed vigor in the propagation of the same. One could safely assume that Dastangoi was a consequence of this wave of linguistic renewal in the latter case, while it was a consequence of Akbar's preferences.



Dr. Arjumand, Authority on Urdu Literature.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The Hamzanama's content, as far as can be discussed, is another matter of import. Dastangoi, the language which was referred to as a "linguistic hodge-podge" (Arjumand, Interview) was immensely influenced by the parent cultures of these composite languages- Urdu, Persian, Hindavi et al. Decidedly, the content of the Hamzanama is hence an agglomeration of tales from these cultures. Pervading the landmass was one unifying force- Islam. (Arjumand, interview) Dastangoi, despite the new face it now presents cannot be stripped down and isolated from its heavily Islamic heritage. Most of this heritage is a result of the texts, precisely those of the Hamzanama and the Tilism. The Hamza Dastan is the collection of tales of the invincible hero, Amir Hamza (a historical figure, mythologized by way of syncretism) who was the paternal uncle of the Holy Prophet, Mohammed. "The Original Hamza, or Hamza bin Abu Muttalib was known to be the strongest man in his tribe, a warrior, a hunter and an outdoor man." (Aijazuddin, 2009 pp.xiii) Hamza is also the legendary Persian warrior hero, a man which conquers lands beyond the human realm- his reach extends to the Tilism, the magical land ruled by the emperor Afrasiyaab- as continued in the Tilism-e-Hoshrubā. The word "Tilism" refers to the land as well as "magic" itself; incorporating a primordial pantheon of Gods such as Samri and Jamshed which were later "false gods" as far as Islam was concerned. To illustrate their invocation-

"Sing O minstrel for my cup of life brimmeth over

Under the nine vaults of heaven

From the revolutions of the cosmos I intone like the pipe

At the fate of Jamshēd

and the fortunes of Kaikhusrau." (Jha, 1883 pp.240)

Cheekily, the Tilism-e-Hoshrubā often follows one trend in its corpus of Dastans- the hero is on the quest of the "Lauh-e-Tilism", a keystone which would be instrumental in conquering Tilism. His original quest, however, is that of spreading the "One true faith" to Persia- to do this, he defeats the Persian emperor Nehshurvan. Meanwhile, much of the plot would dabble in the fact that the citizens of Tilism were adopting

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

false gods- some righteous characters would convert to Islam in one mere sentence-while the others were soundly defeated by the righteous hero, the practitioner of the religion. (Aijazuddin, 2009 pp.xiv) On the cosmic level, one may simply then analyze it to be a battle of religious supremacy between Allah and the Persian pantheon, and later the resistance and subsequent quelling of the resistance Islam met in the middle eastern regions, and then in India. This also provides the reflection of the social context as many scholars remark- this may be reflective of the advent of Islam in India- but, the contradiction is that there are too many Persian influences for it to be an Islamic advent-hence, it is much like a massive oral tradition isolated, selectively chosen, crystallized and finally synthesized. The nature of these filters is something we cannot determine at this point in time due to the sheer lack of sources, we can only speculate. The Tilism is also said to be heavily influenced by the Persian Shahnama with over 15000 couplets composed in 1010 A.D. (Aijazuddin, 2009 pp.xiv) The similarity is extremely stylistic, in the sense that the Shahnama also follows the narrator format of the oral tradition, indicating that it was a text meant to be told, to be performed- akin to the Hamzanama and the Tilism. (Heston, 1986 pp.80) The following flowchart will depict the content of these tales in a coherent manner.



The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The canon hence proceeds in a logical sequence, as Hamza and his descendants continue to be in focus for the entire canon. The sheer number of these tales is such that the contemporary Dastango has not performed them all, and will not be able to complete them in the near future, even if he presumably performs them exclusively. This is exclusively the case with the oral tradition, and as S.R. Faruqi aptly remarks-

***"The reason behind the continuous expansion of the Dastan, and its demonstrating a cascading effect, is that it is recited orally. Therefore, instead of the Law of Causality, it is subject to the Law of Possibility."*(Farooqui, 2009pp.135)**

The conversion of every major character to Islam, along with the heavy Persian influences (even the language is Pashto, an Iranian dialect) makes determining the context of these Dastans difficult. While we do not necessarily opt for reductionist explanations, many academics do maintain that these Dastans were used for entertainment purposes purely. The validity of such an explanation can be tested- however, much of the literature available, especially by authorities on this field indicates as much. Frances Pritchett has traced the development and transference of Dastans from ancient Persia to India, and she maintains the purposes of entertainment throughout the geographical locations in which Dastangoi and other oral traditions were being practiced as art forms. This discussion, however occupies another part of the report. For now, we will discuss the canon in some detail in order to provide a context- this is because elements like the Saki-nama have been introduced because of the very reason the audience is nascent, unprepared. The second topic at hand is to provide a list of common elements in the Hamzanama. What is interesting to note is the feedback mechanism phenomenon- by this, I refer to the fact that the canon of Dastangoi was not uniformly synthesized, or even modified. Its popularity, however has been reinforced and noted by Pritchett time and again – ***"One narrative in particular, the Qissah-e Hamzah or Dastan-e Amir Hamzah, became far more popular in India than it had ever been in its homeland. Its nominal hero was Hamzah ibn ,Abd al-Muttalib, a historical figure who was the Prophet's paternal uncle. But if Hamzah was historical, the magical and***

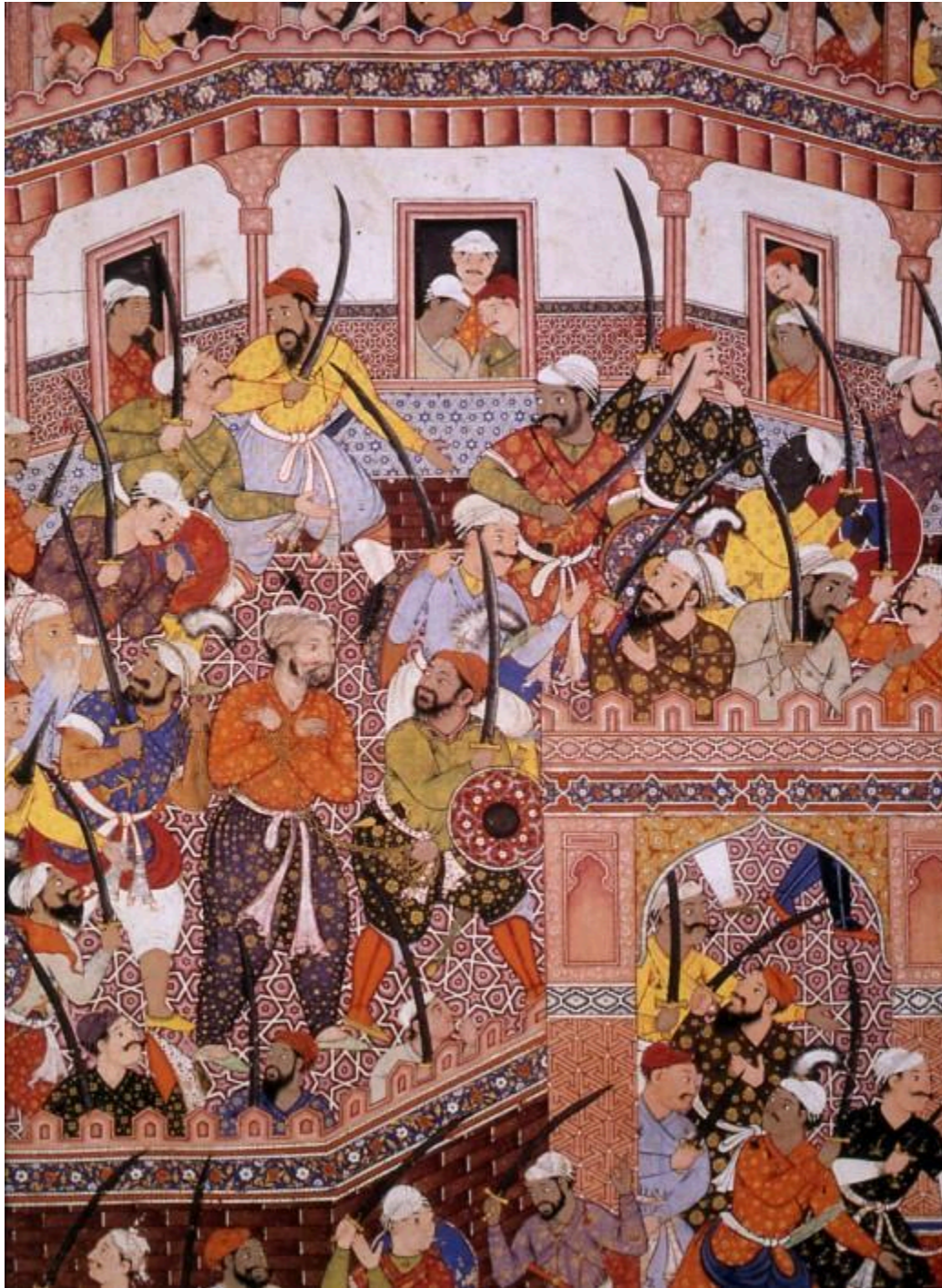
The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

romantic encounters ascribed to him definitely were not.” (Pritchett, 2001 pp.15)

The common elements of the Hamzanama have been underlined by Mohammed Hussain Jha, who, in his text “Hoshruha: The land and the Tilism” has made an extremely cohesive translation of the Tilism, while providing a glossary and other informative material to educate readers about the text in itself. Another groundbreaking article we can examine is that of Mushrraff Farooqui, who has thoroughly analyzed the entirety of the Hamza narrative, while having broken down elements of Dastangoi from the same. If we are to cohesively study Dastangoi, this is perhaps the most exhaustive text on the ancient canon. Other sections of the report do deal with the difficulty of defining Dastangoi in the modern context, but its canon does not necessarily have to delve into the same haze, provided we have sources. We will be extensively borrowing from this article for the next subsection.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The Hamzanama – A Total Book?



A Dated Hamzanama Illustration- University of Vienna

This section deals with the nature of the Hamzanama, or we refer to it as “the Amir Hamza cycle of texts” and its publishing process. To begin with, we will look at the entirety of the published Hamzanama, with all its editions and volumes. The period from 1880 to 1920 was a highly productive time for this tome of tomes,

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

and it was roughly divided into eight books, or Daftars. Each of these Daftars comprise of several volumes, with editions coming out often in the same year or much later. The authors of these were merely collecting the entirety of the Oral Dastan tradition, grasping at fragments of tales and composite stories, translating them into Urdu whenever necessary, editing them, making additions et al. at their own discretion. The marginalization of Urdu under the colonial yoke could possibly have a censored effect on the tradition, resulting in texts not necessarily complete. However, this gargantuan undertaking took Munshi Nawal Kishore over 30 years, and is extremely exhaustive. One can also realize that this undertaking could never have proceeded without the zeal of the authors- "collecting" and documenting oral tradition may seem like a futile process right from its inception to its deliverance, as such a compendium can never necessarily be complete. The Hamzanama also exists in three separate texts-

1. "*Dastan-e Amir Hamza*" by Khalil Ali Khan Ashk, Fort William College, Calcutta Press, 1801.
2. "*Tarjuma-e Dastan-e Sahibqiran Giti-sitan Aal-e Paighambar-e Aakhiruz Zaman Amir Hamza bin Abdul Muttalib bin Hashim bin Abdul Munaf*" by Mirza Amar Ali Khan Bahadur Ghalib Lakhnawi, Calcutta, Hakim Press, 1855.
3. "*Dastan-e Amir Hamza Sahibqiran*" by Bahadur Ghalib Lakhnawi and Abdullah Husain Bilgrami, Nawal Kishore Press, 1871. (Farooqui, 2009 pp. 463)

These published editions do not contain the Hoshruha. The distinction between the Hoshruha and the Hamzanama is extremely simple- the Hamzanama comprises of both, mythical and legendary elements while the Hoshruha is a tale of pure fantasy. How much of these tales can be contextualized and analyzed is any academic's bet; however, we will not be dabbling in its overlapping spheres, as terminology becomes extremely problematic.

The Hoshruha was, however give its due in the Amir Hamza cycle published by Nawal Kishore's printing press. As remarked above, there were several editions and volumes published. The primary authors for these

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

were Syed Tasadduq Hussain, Ahmed Husain Qamar, Muhammed Ismail Hasar and Pyare Mirza. Following is the exhaustive list for examination, complete with the year of publishing and the consecutive volumes.

BOOK ONE

Naushervan Nama Vol 1. 1893, Vol 2. 1898-99

Hurmuz Nama 1900.

Homan Nama 1900.

BOOK TWO

Kochak Bakhtar 1892.

BOOK THREE

Bala Bakhtar 1899.

BOOK FOUR

Iraj Nama (2 Vols.) 1893.

BOOK FIVE (7 Volumes)

Tilism-e Hoshroba Vol.1, 1883 Vol.2, 1884 Vol.3, 1888-89 Vol.4, 1890 Vol.5 Part.01, Part.02-1891, Vol.6, 1892 Vol.7. 1893

BOOK SIX

Sandli Nama, 1895

BOOK SEVEN

Turaj Nama Vols. 01 & 02 – 1896

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

BOOK EIGHT (26 Volumes)

La'l Nama Vol.1, Vol.2 - 1896

Aftab-e Shujaat Vol.1, 1903 Vol.2, 1903 Vol.3, 1904 Vol.4, 1905 Vol.5 Part I, 1908 Vol.5 Part II, 1908.

Gulistan-e Bakhtar Vol.1, 1909 vol.2, 1909 Vol.3, 1917.

Tilism-e Fitna-e Nur Afshan Vol.1, Vol.2, Vol.3 - 1896

Baqiya-e Tilism-e Hoshruha Vol.1, Vol.2 - 1897

Tilism-e Haft Paikar Vol.1, Vol.2, Vol.3 - 1897

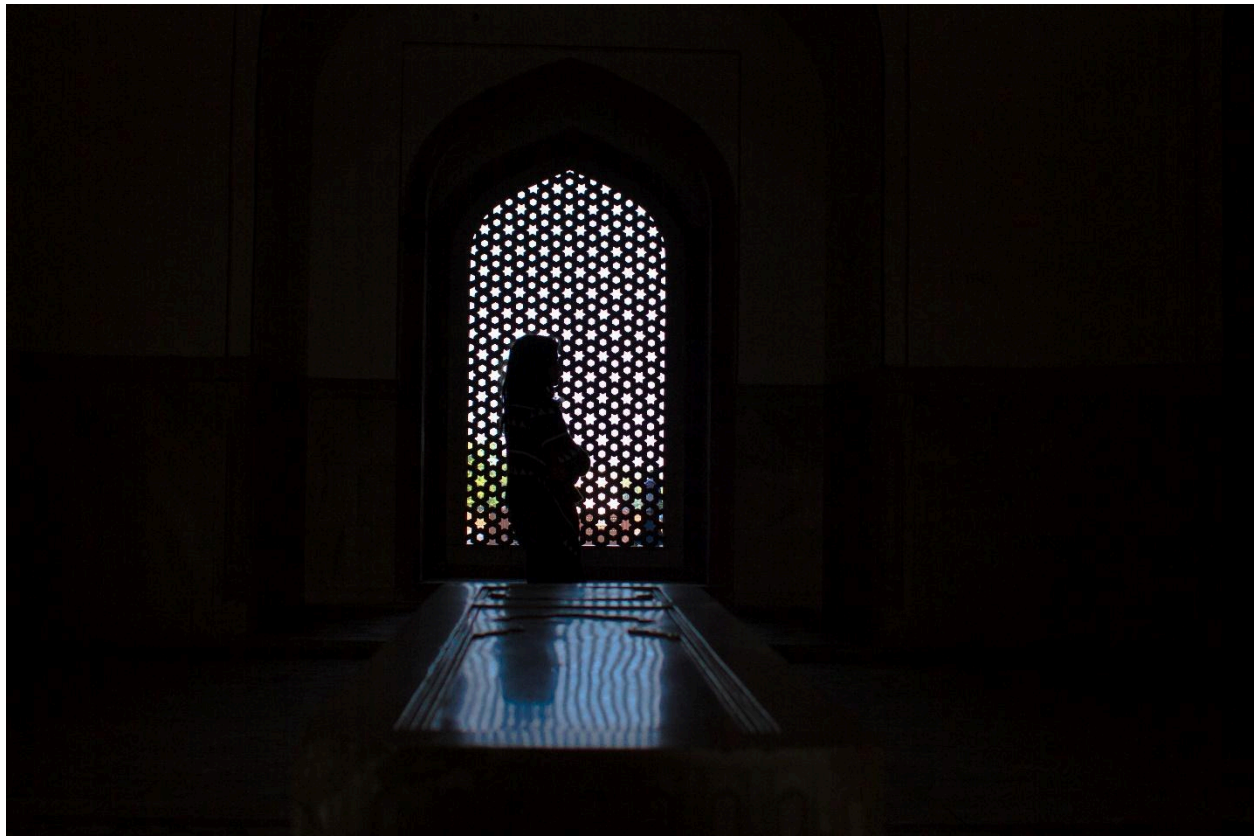
Tilism-e Khiyal-e Sikanderi Vol.1, Vol.2, Vol.3 - 1897

Tilism-e Naukhez-e Jamshedi Vol.1, 1901 Vol.2, 1902 Vol.3, 1903.

Tilism-e Zafaranzar-e Suleimani Asar Vol.1, Vol.2, Vol.3 – 1905. (Farooqui, 2009pp.454)

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The Shadow of an Author



Shadows and Light-Humayun's Tomb.

The report has repeatedly hinted at the fact that Oral traditions are not necessarily-or rather, never the work of a singular author. However, when we mean author in this traditionalist sense, we often tend to take a lot from the term. The term which would be applicable when this hints at the author, would be the one who influenced, integrated and thereafter expanded the canon of Dastangoi, which later culminated into the formation of what was the Amir Hamza cycle. This shadowy figure, was the Dastango Mir Ahmed Ali. Mir Ahmed Ali was not acclaimed as a Dastango beforehand- however, much of the occult Islamic influences and the influx of the Hoshruha seems to be his doing. In fact, the word "Hoshruha" (Hosh-The senses, Ruba-The Ravishing of/Captivation of) has been accredited to him. ***"The selective incorporation of tales into the epic Hamza tradition, the incorporation of magical flora and fauna, of black and white magic, of alpha sorcerers and sorceresses to mention but a few elements are his contribution to the tale that is the***

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Hoshruha."(Farooqui, 2009 pp.ix) Using the existing structure of the Hamza Dastan and making additions of his own, the fantasy took birth.

"Mir Ahmed Ali wanted to make Hoshruha the most sharp-clawed, shiny-scaled tale in the whole of the Amir Hamza cycle so he liberally poured in vicious sorceresses, nubile trickster girls, powerful wizards and dreaded monsters and stirred the tale with non-stop action. In that process, Mir Ahmed Ali transcended the whole business of legend making and created a fantasy – the first, the longest, and the greatest fantasy of the Dastan genre." (Farooqui, 2009 pp.ix)

The addition of and the focus on the "False God Laqa", the quintessential villain of the Hoshruha series was isolated, amplified and given a prominent role in the secondary canon. What is even more interesting that there are two levels of attribution provided- Mir Ahmed Ali was a storyteller from Lucknow. His attribution of the creation of the Hoshruha to Faizi (1547-1595), Emperor Akbar's poet-laureate, so to speak, was that of legitimizing this tradition, and lending it immense credibility as much of the populace knew the role of Akbar in the patronization of this tradition. This, in effect created yet another shadow- to quote Farooqui,

"Mir Ahmed Ali would be the ghost-writer of a writer ghost." (Farooqui, 2009 pp.x)

This addition was extremely dubious; however, inquiry was not initiated into the legitimacy of this claim at that point in time. Mir Ahmed Ali would later be commissioned by none other than the prince of Rampur, and the tradition of Dastangoi hence begins; with Mir Ahmed Ali establishing a firm base in Lucknow; leaving the Hoshruha tradition to ferment, and evolve. The timeline after that exists as follows:

Mir Ahmed Ali → Amba Prasad Rasa → Ghulam Raza → (Nawal Kishore) Mohammed Husain Jha → Ahmed Husain Qamar → Later translated works.

The haze of subterfuge surrounding the printing of this tome is difficult to part. Mohammed Jha and Qamar were competitors- of the storytelling tradition, i.e. they were accomplished storytellers themselves, which lent them credibility in the sphere of compiling the plethora of stories. Mohammed Jha did not continue work after Book four of the Hamzanama; the mantle of which would have been taken by Qamar- and this

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

escalated into a rivalry of the compilers, with Jha trying to publish the rest privately and Nawal Kishore responding to the challenge by having Qamar publish the rest efficiently, despite Jha's insistence and the difficulties of collection and compilation. (Farooqui, 2009pp.xii)

The rest, as they say is history. The decline of Dastangoi was the contribution of many factors, including the marginalization of Urdu, the frivolity attributed to the Urdu storytelling tradition, particularly Dastans. However, why does this report bother giving such an extensive discourse on the Dastangoi Canon of literature? Consider the simplicity of the elaborate concoction that was the Hoshrubha. It would not have received even a fragment of the credit and worldwide acclaim it has garnered over the years due to the efforts of the Nawal Kishore press and other writers; and moreover, contemporary Dastangos rely heavily upon the printed text that is the Hamzanama- they would not have even that rare window of opportunity to encounter, analyze and perform one if the canon did not exist, let alone use some building blocks from those to construct new ones. This art form, despite its steep, almost non-existent state did not undergo the complete truncation. As has been explored in other sections, the art form has undergone a revival, or to use the correct term, reinvention- and in the canon of Dastangoi, we have new names which contribute to the existing literature. This is when, we come to the Contemporary Dastan.

The Contemporary Canon.

Upon quizzing numerous Dastangos upon what they do use for their performative purposes, most of them often refer to the Hamzanama as their staple source for stories. As the text itself possesses a "rhythm, resonating with its rich use of Urdu" (Girdhani, Interview)

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama



Poonam Girdhani, Dastango

it makes the performer's task easier- provided they have a certain measure of fluency with the language. However, upon observing many of their newer performances, the deviation to Dastans of their own is quite stark. Our interviews tell us that out of the entire community, extremely few Dastangos write their own Dastans, a practice not alien to Mir Ahmed Ali and the rest of the Lakhnavi Dastangos. Adapting a story to suit the needs of the populace is something they have resorted to, in order to garner interest, offset the lack of understanding of Urdu the audience has, and conditioning this very nascent audience in order to further propagate their enterprise and increase their audience base. (Sikander, interview) The Dastangos Ankit Chadha and more prominently Mehmood Farooqui are the only ones who have successfully adapted existing stories or written original ones. Recently, we see the Dastangos Poonam Girdhani and Fouzia adapt the story

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

of "Ghummi Kababi"; this is a story Fouzia has adapted on her own in order to hearken back to the richness of Old Delhi, of which a "Kababi" (kebab vendor) was an integral component of. (Fouzia, Interview)



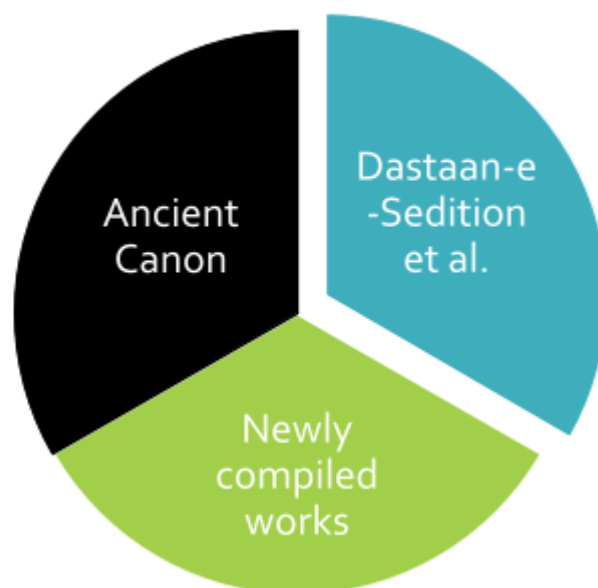
Ghummi Kababi? – Old Delhi, Jama Masjid.

Hence, when we break down the components of the literature of this canon, we see a drastic difference in themes. Moreover, the contemporary Dastan does not deal with fantasy. The few Dastans we have seen/heard being performed deal heavily with social context. They are also sociographical in that sense, where they map the changing state of society, marked by particular events around which the Dastan is centered- for example, we see the "Dastan-e-Taqseem-e-Hind", or the Dastan of the Partition of India highlight the events which loosely revolve around that particular event- i.e. this Dastan remarks upon some peculiar features of the nature of the partition, along with a running commentary of all that was lost. The Dastans take certain liberties with the language too, making comprehension easier- the use of Hindi, and even English is incorporated. Adaptations range from Tagore to Manto- the list of Dastans is small- some other examples include the Chauboli, the Dastan-e-Sedition, and Mantoiyat. The reason given by Mehmood Farooqui for the lack of new canon is easy to process- adapting a text meant to be read, and then

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

converting it to text meant to be recited, or said is no easy feat, especially if one wants to involve some measure of Urdu. The juxtaposition of language, while making it easier to understand makes the Dastan loose most of its aural harmony and rhythm which makes the performance appealing. Hence, we see that the twin points of comprehension and aural appeal which are put to the test and have to be balanced on a pair of scales- not something which is easy for the writer to do. (M.Farooqui, Interview)

There have been new authors on the literary scene. Musharraf Ali Farooqui has translated the Hoshrubah into one comprehensive book called "Hoshrubah: The land and the Tilism". However, books like these and the other oft cited book by Shehnaz Aijazuddin "Tilism-e-Hoshrubah" are meant to garner a reading audience rather than being part of the canon for Dastangoi performances. Unless we witness Dastangoi taking extreme liberties with the language, such as being completely performed in English, these books will not be considered a canon; at least, not as far as performance is concerned. This is not an ironclad rule of selection and labeling- we simply do this to distinguish the two. The following chart illustrates-



The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

This section, thus effectively examines and deals with the canon of Dastangoi Literature. The next section will examine the Dastangoi tradition with reference to Dastangos themselves, and their contributions to the art form.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Elements of Dastangoi

This section deals with the fundamental breakdown of the Dastan used for the performative purposes of Dastangoi. This section also deals with the elements of a Dastan in general, as we need to understand the differences the performers use for the sake of a comparison. We can understand this in the vein of using the analogy of building blocks making up a Dastan- and in effect, Dastangoi, as delineating the two would be a facile exercise. This is in agreement with the existing literature we have on the topic. To prove this particular point, we refer to Pritchett and Faruqui's work.

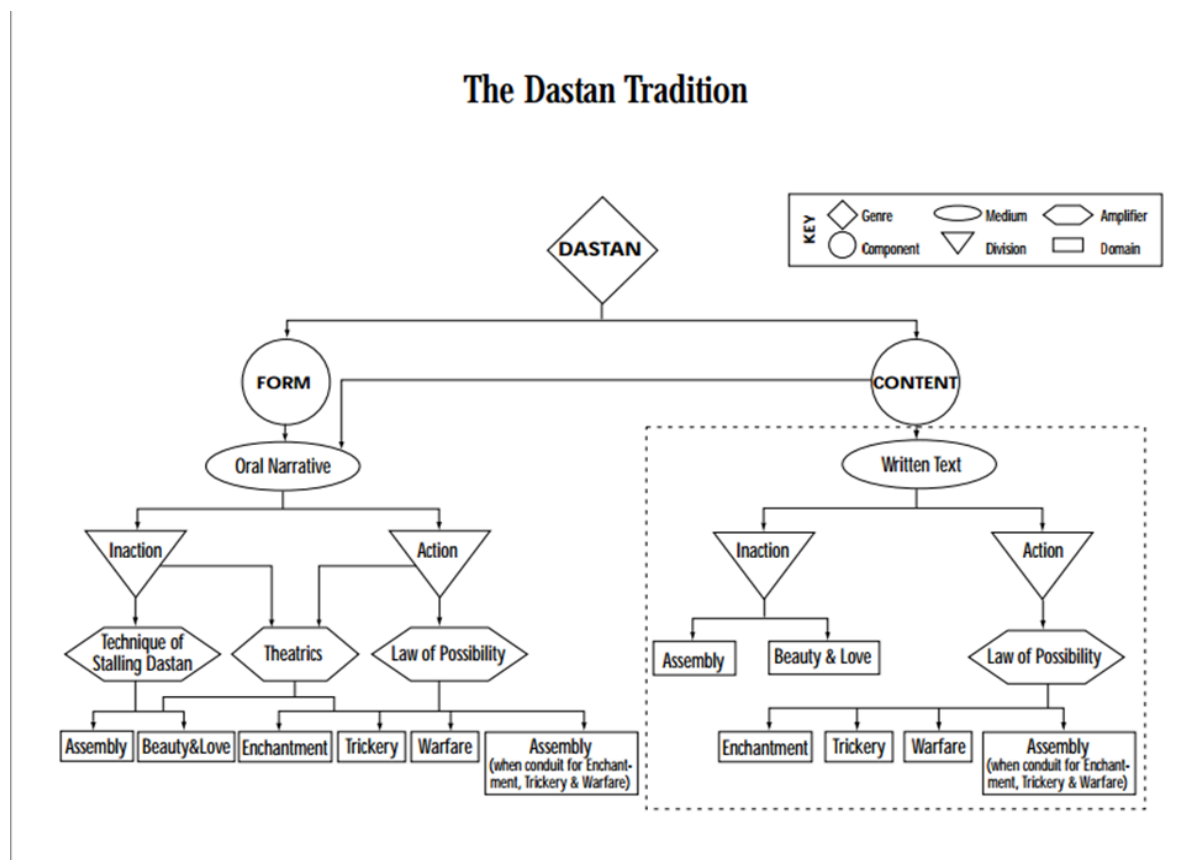


Fig. 01. The Complete Breakdown of the Dastan, Musharraf Ali Farooqui, 2009.

The diagram above details the composite elements of a Dastan, with the overarching divisions being that of form and content- the basic tenets of any art "object". This, asserts Farooqui was the breakdown of the form

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

when Dastangoi still existed as a tradition. There are a plethora of definitions for the term we loosely use as "tradition"; to illustrate, as Handler and Linnekin express-

"The naturalistic conception of tradition can be traced to a lineage of Western social-scientific thought that dates at least from Edmund Burke and the reaction to the Enlightenment (Mannheim 1953). The 19th-century concepts of tradition and traditional society, used (whether as ideal types or as empirical generalizations) as a baseline against which to understand social change and "modern society," were embodied in such well-known dichotomies as Maine's status and contract, Tonnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, Durkheim's mechanical and organic solidarity, and, into the 20th century, Sapir's genuine and spurious culture and Redfield's folk-urban continuum."(Handler and Linnekin, 1984 pp.274)

The folk urban continuum and the dichotomy of old and new, with the old continuum being understood as what tradition is would have held true if Dastangoi did not suffer a decline, or rather, eradication. Treading carefully upon the use of this word which implies that Dastangoi was nullified, to an extent that it is almost unheard of and hailed as a contemporary practice, something which is now appreciated by the audience as a novelty due to many reasons- the use of Urdu, and the corpus of stories it uses for its performances. The canon of texts utilized for Dastangoi will be discussed later- however, due to the lack of available scholarly studies on the same, as well as the decline of these texts, Dastangoi has gained a steep popularity in the contemporary timeframe.

While it may seem facetious to outline the components of the art form in such a manner, the chart is still quite extensive- and it is still a salute to the Dastango's virtuosity in incorporating the entirety of these elements in one singular, "traditional" Dastan. Let us not forget that the ancient canon outlines the use of magic and other surreal elements, while the contemporary one may not even remotely dabble in those, which is a fundamental problem with examining these Dastans in one frame.

Ancient Dastango's are also aptly referred to as "walking talking encyclopedias" (Husain, interview)- which brings us to Jain's incorporation of two additional components into the art- eloquence, and knowledge.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

(Farooqui, 2010 pp.130) Another instance of a shaky ground is when we compare the Dastango to an actor without the context. A Dastango has now been associated with the actor precisely because Mehmood Farooqui and his troupe of Dastangos are comprised of many actors, who have now taken up Dastangoi with proscenium style aid, completely integrated with the Dastangoi practice.



Mehmood Farooqui – The Spearhead of the Movement.

These, however are the performative elements. The above point is made for one simple clarification- the elements of Dastangoi fluctuate from its textual form to its oral, where there is more focus on recitation, the temporal stop of the Dastan et al.

Musharraf Farooqui Jha remarks upon the excessive “cause and effect” based on Borges’ Law of Possibility in a Dastan. (Farooqui, 2009 pp.135) The Law of Possibility in this context dictates that one can take ample opportunities with the plot and storyline once elements such as magic, illusion and seduction are incorporated into the narrative. The Dastan which needs to focus on magical elements can play around with the plot so indefinitely, that it results in a continuous chain of probabilities of plot-or, to use Borges’ term,

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

the possibilities of plot. When the Dastan itself is highly adaptive and reflexive, we can say the same about its narration, which is Dastangoi.

Without further ado, let us now examine the elements of Dastangoi. Before that, we make the distinction- Persian Dastans had four-five known elements, namely *Razm (Warfare)*, *Bazm (Assembly)*, *Ishq (Love)* and *Aiyyari (Trickery)*. The incorporation of elements with reference to the DAH (Dastan-e-Amir Hamza) and other texts such as the *Tilism* has significantly increased. The Persian Dastan, with decidedly oral inclinations cannot simply depend upon the elements of Love and Beauty (which were often used as passive elements in a Dastan, to stall for time et al.) upon reaching the literary stage, with the text constructed to be told- incorporating the elements of *Tilism (Magic/Enchantment)* decidedly, a very important addition which contributed to the adaptive nature of the Dastan. We will examine these elements in a step wise manner.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Razm (Warfare)

This element is the focal counterpoint to that of the element of Ishq, or love. Do note that all elements in the faculty of Dastangoi can ascend, descend, counterbalance, over and underestimate each other. This being said there are often conflicts between these two elements. Razm, or warfare is integral because the hero's actions either begin with the profound love for battle or conquest, or certain reasons culminate in the phenomenon that precisely is warfare. That is to say, Razm can be both, cause and effect- the love for it in the first case, or the effect of some cause, like love in the second- where the hero takes up arms to rout the opposing forces for the sake of Ishq. This case can be exemplified if we examine Hamza himself- upon trying to wed Nehshurvan's daughter, he takes up arms; however, even upon being granted his wish, he is not sated and insists on routing the enemy, to which the trickster Amar Ayyar, his closest confidant and ally remarks that it is indeed not Ishq but the love of Razm which Hamza thrives on. (Farooqui, 2009 pp.155)

This is not to say that love takes a back seat in the notion of Razm. Many of Baiduz Zaman's battles are fought for the sake of love, for the princesses in Afrasiyaab's abode, along with the battles of the prince Asad Lion Heart. Another interesting plot point is the battle between the male ayyars in Hamza's retinue and the female ayyars in Afrasiyaab's. This illustrates the mock battle/lover's relationship the two sides possess, which often results in the tide of the battle turning with them remaining relatively unscathed despite the turn of events.

In addition, if we are to examine the nature of the hero, which in most cases in Amir Hamza, we can highlight the importance of Razm. He is remarked upon by scholars to be a "composite hero" (Farooqui, 2009 pp. 155) not an uncommon practice in any literary-oral tradition. A composite hero, to effect comprises the natures and characters of all existing heroes in one particular timeframe, or spanning several- where, Alexander the Great, Cyrus the Great et al. are used to make up a manifold greatness- the character of Hamza. These heroes are known for their deeds- however, Hamza stakes claim over all their deeds in a mythologized reification, and as Farooqui remarks- "conspicuously so." (Farooqui, 2009 pp.156) This makes warfare all the

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

more integral, as you can observe precisely what these heroes were famous for- in this case, warfare, conquest, subjugation, establishment of a new order and so on.

Therefore, when modern day Dastango's do narrate a Dastan in the vein of the Hamzanama, we can observe that there is a marked enunciation on the process of battle and conquest, which enunciates itself via the narrative-

***"How can I describe to you the swordplay of that time? Prince Nul Al Dahar rode in, flashing the Suleimani sword from one side, while Badi-uz-Zaman exhibited the gigantic tegha of Tilism Tahmaroos. Bahar and Baghban threw thousands of bouquets and the rain of blade like petals flew, letting a stream of blood flow to the ground."* (Aijazuddin, 2009 pp.885)**

Another factor we can observe is the seemingly endless nature of Razm- this is exemplified by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's study of the Dastan, where the narrative keeps going with either one villain being replaced by the next, or the existing villain finding a thousand innovative ways to escape from their current predicament. Warfare does keep escalating in scale every time Laqa faces Hamza, and successfully escapes; this creates a parasitic effect the hero has on the villain- in order to sustain his own tale, the villain needs to escape or in the process of being destroyed, lay the foundation of a new one. (S.R Faruqi)

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Bazm (Assembly)

"May the evil eye spare your festive court!"

"My Wail becomes a song, aha! Arriving at your door." – Ghalib



Courtly Assembly, Humayun's Tomb.

"Bazm", or assembly is another of the four elements, arguably the most subdued element. This is the conduit between the other three elements, serving as the focal point where the action slows down in anticipation of the Warfare, Trickery and Magic which is about to erupt. "Assembly" can mean multiple things, but it often refers to a court, an encampment or an area where allies congregate and converse. It may also be the soon to be battleground, where usually a scene quite distant from the overarching battle may play out, serving as one of the troughs of the story where the audience may be relieved of the continuous slew of battles taking place. It is the intermediary phase, where the main character may also be preparing for warfare or may be caught unawares. The verse by Ghalib illustrates the volatility of this component, where

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

an ongoing battle may suddenly shake the foundations of plot when the audience is being provided with the image of illusory, temporary peace. An example would be that of the celebrations in Bahar Jadoo's court, where the trickster Amar Aiyyar is poised to strike- the scene is extremely idyllic-

"Bahar Jadoo, drunk on the wine and music, sang along with Amar and finally succumbed to the drug...she was oblivious to the world, her pajamas climbed up her thighs, her veil was tossed aside and her bosom was exposed. He then quickly pierced her tongue with a needle and tied her to a pillar."

(Aijazuddin, 2009 pp.74)

Suddenly, the action is in place, replaced by the element of aiyyari, along with a series of events which soon follow suit. The conduit, no matter how subdued still remains an integral part of the Dastan.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Tilism (Enchantment/Rapture)



Through the lens- Rapture.

To understand this particular element, which is decidedly a major one (it comprises of the active components) we need to examine the mythologization of characters which has caused this invention to take place. The sheer amount of syncretism which takes place in the construction of these Dastans is remarkable, so much so that the characters exist on the dual planes of reality and myth. (Farooqui, 2009pp.140) Another quote by Farooqui also illustrates the nature of why enchantment is necessary with the coupling of the dual nature of characters and their deeds-

***"Therefore, we say that a fantastic world admits of a dual, mythical existence for all objects and creatures, irrespective of their place in Time. In other words, the fantasy of the storyteller is the rabbit hole which could transport not only Alice, but her surroundings to Wonderland."* (Farooqui, 2009pp.141)**

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The nature of enchantment here indicates that the need to mythologize allowed for the highly fantastical elements to be incorporated into the legendary narratives of Hamza, allowing the storyteller great leeway in terms of invention and continuous action, with the deft touch of the magical. This accompanies the oft-cited reason as to why Dastangoi was even performed- the need to escape from reality, and the need for the transportation of the reader to an entirely new dimension could not be wholly possible unless the element of Tilism was present, where the reader is now, with the aid of the Dastango's skill, able to visualize something unheard of, something unwitnessed in his reality. The Dastango does not weave a net of lies, so much as the net of enchantment and rapture around the one who is at the receiving end; as the viewer does not simply transcend into another reality, but learns to transpose that fantasy on his existing reality, choosing to accept the fact that indeed, it is fantasy- which is where the symbiotic relationship between the narrator and the viewer plays out. The characters undergo a more profound transformation, where they were once simply legendary; they now employ weapons of such a nature that the fabric of reality is often shattered. However, there are a certain set of rules in that reality too, which, no matter how enchanted, have to be followed. Afrasiyaab will be defeated by the man who possesses the Lauh-e-Tilism, despite its mystic origins and despite there being no answer as to why this should be so. The viewer, in effect needs to suspend his own reality, but embrace the reality the Tilism provides. This is also why Tilism *also* refers to the enchanted land which the hero must conquer, suspending his own reality and all his rules when he enters the enchanted land. Farooqui comments on this phenomenon-

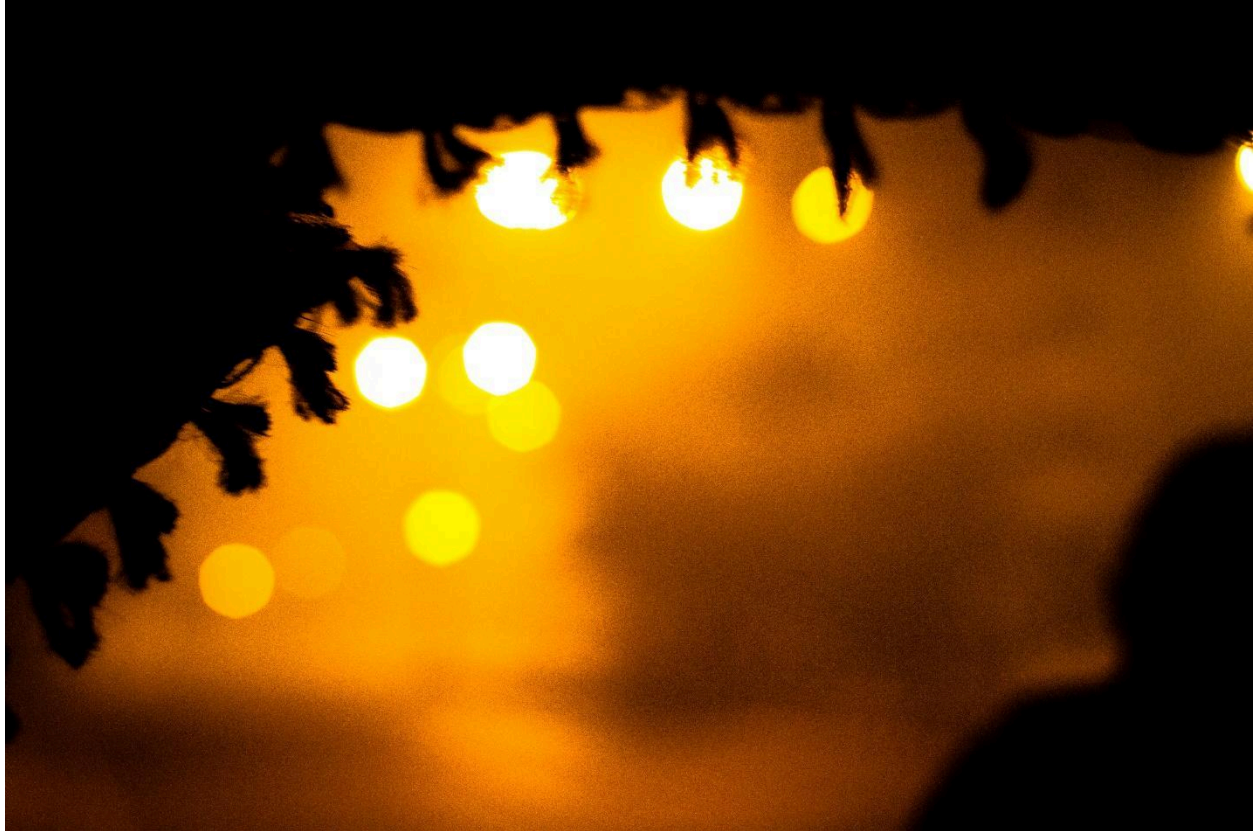
***"For the Dastan to be successful, the enchantment woven by the narrator's fantasy, needs the second layer of the reader's own fantasy to sustain it."* (Farooqui, 2009pp.142)**

One cannot agree more. The Tilism, however is not absolute- it is permeated when the narrator, or the writer of the Dastan choses to do so. This is exemplified by Qamar's insertion of himself in the text at times, often lauding himself as an unparalleled storyteller being mentioned by characters which are clearly mythical- while there is no concrete reason to do so, the element of Tilism also makes the reader not question the logic of this narrative. Hence, suspension of disbelief, and the complete acceptance of the alternate reality along with the cementing of

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

the narrator's relationship with the viewers' are three fundamental purposes Tilism serves. Moreover, it serves as the extension of the liberties one can take with the Dastan, containing and releasing components as the Dastango so wishes, making it an ideal element to incorporate.

Aiyyari (Trickery)



Night time Illusions – Pitampura, Delhi

The role of the trickster is not uncommon or unheard of in Urdu literature. In the context of Dastangoi, Aiyyari often refers to the trickery employed by these tricksters, often in lieu of unconventional weapons, disguises, illusions and so on. Aiyyari is also another active element in the vein of Dastangoi. The role of the trickster is underlined by the element of supreme cunning. Cunning and guile, however, if one were to examine fiction today are often the traits of the hero in addition to other traits such as bravery et al. or, they are the traits of the seedy antagonist, who resorts to these whenever possible. Decidedly, they are subdued, or acquire a noble overtone when the protagonist possesses them. The character of the trickster in a Dastan

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

acquires a supportive role, either for or against the protagonist, but always taking directives of some sort.

The trickster, for all his guile and cunning, can never seem to shake of the sword of command above him – be it Afrasiyaab or Hamza, to whom he forever remains bound, despite the trickster's tenacity to act with self interest in mind. The trickster represents everything that is non-conventional in the already fantastic world of the Dastan, using shape-shifting where magicians can transmute the nature of the object itself- using poison bombs where magicians would resort to destructive magic- gagging, trussing up and putting enemies to sleep whereas direct combat and magical battles were the norm. Tricksters operate in the shadows, as far as method is concerned. Humorous situations also arise due to the trickster's atrocities and the employment of crude speech. Aiyysars exist for two to three particular purposes- one, is disaster mitigation, the second is disaster pre-emption and the third is the alternative dynamic. More often than not, we will observe the deployment of these aiyysars to rescue certain prominent characters from the antagonist's grasp; who will be unable to retaliate in the conventional manner due to their unconventional methods. Disaster pre-emption is often also the realm of the aiyyar, for with their cunning and deplorable use of tactics, their lack of trust for other characters often leads them to have contingency plans in place. One may say that the aiyyar is never really caught off guard. They have a plethora of tricks up their sleeve- although, as Farooqui does observe, ***"they are hardly as reliant on their trickery as magicians are on their magic". (Farooqui, 2009 pp.153)*** The illusory nature of the aiyyar has not gone unnoticed, even by practitioners of the art, seeing that they do need to describe his illusions to a great length to make it believable to themselves, and then the audience. A sizable amount of effort, both in terms of linguistic flair and exhaustive description will be given, to say- the beautiful, peerless attendant the aiyyar is impersonating, for the purposes of infiltration and seduction, than it would be given to a non-illusory character. Hence, we see ***"the narrator lend legitimacy to his own illusion". (Farooqui, 2009 pp.154)***

This, in effect is the composite breakdown of a Dastan. Over and above this, there is but one final element we need to discuss, which does not quite fall under the conventional category of Dastangoi elements, and that is the technique of "Dastan-rokna."

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Dastan-Rokna

Imagine, a frame in time where your perception of it were drastically altered, where you realize that you have been somewhat lured into this loop which takes you away from your destination, promising that this deviation would be purely transient, and that you would soon return to the original path you were on- this, in effect is the subtle effect of the Dastan rokna technique. While this may seem extremely poetic in description, Dastan rokna is often one of the hardest elements for the Dastango to master, as this necessarily requires a sizable amount of improvisation. This is the point where the Dastango “stalls”, or freezes the ongoing Dastan, and using the powers of his narrative skills, embarks on a side story where he may devote that time to anything remotely connected to where he stopped the Dastan, or anything else for that matter. After having stopped the Dastan for whatever reasons, he will then resume it after a period, keeping the audience in the constant state of alertness and curiosity. (Farooqui, Interview)

What, then are the reasons as to why this technique is implemented? One, is the engagement of the audience. It was often the a method adopted by Dastangos to keep the audience on tenterhooks for them to soon return the next day, expecting the plot to move forward- although, it was also testament to the Dastango's skills if he could keep the audience sufficiently engaged despite the fact that he was not touching the primary story. The example cited by at least three Dastangos we encountered and interviewed in Delhi was that of the prince, mounted on horseback, ready to go to battle. (Fouzia, Girdhani, Farooqui – Personal interviews) The Dastan would then stop, as the Dastango would delve into the intricate details of the clothing the prince wore, the types of weapons he carried, generic types of weapons available in that age, the stance of the horse, the description of the horse, the breed of horse, how to take care of a horse and suitably groom it, the jewelry adorning the prince, the types of ornaments which one could purchase otherwise and so on and so forth, until he finally got back to that scene where the prince would then gallop off at full speed towards the battle field. (Husain and Shahidi, Interview) While this description itself seems exhaustive, it is almost nothing compared to the richness of detail provided in the tale by the Dastango. The

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Dastango in effect has the ability to manipulate the time-space continuum without making it appear deliberate. Dr. Arjumand provides an interesting social context to this technique, attributing it to the unavailability of the emperor or nobleman, who had commissioned the Dastango to perform for him. During the narration of a Dastan, which could span several days, if the nobleman was indisposed and had to travel, then it fell upon the Dastango to keep the rest of his retinue entertained. However, the plot could not move forward in that point in time, hence, the Dastan rokna technique would be immensely handy in stalling the plot and then resuming it upon the nobleman's return. (Arjumand, Interview)

These, in effect are the elements a Dastan for the purposes of Dastangoi is comprised of. This discourse is integral to the contemporary understanding of the Dastan; and it provides an ample base for a comparison.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Delhi: The importance of Location

The summer of 1857 was a heady mix of blood and hope, and all for nothing. A puppet king was raised up as the ruler of all of Hindustan and he cared nothing for the revolution. His totem pole was what the sepoys rallied around, and truth be told they needed a rock to tether them in the times that they lived in. Life under the British Raj was not pretty. Even if the revolt did fail, the inhabitants of Hindustan might have reserved some amount of hope for the fact that their grievances might now be observed at the very least, but this too was not to be. One direct consequence of the revolt was the fact that India as a nation was wrestled out of the grasp of the East India Company and came under the direct jurisdiction of the British crown as a legitimate colony. (Nayanjot, 36) Somebody decided to call out the white elephant in the room at some point of time. The revolt was important for a number of reasons and what was of prime importance to nationalist historians of the time, who were Indian of course, was the fact that 1857 was a signifier of a national identity that was emerging and which went against the European ideal of animosity between Hindu's and Muslim's. (Biswamoy, 1687) The upheaval that the mutiny resulted in created a living situation that was untenable to many and this is where we see the migration of individuals from Delhi to Lucknow, so that they might escape the wrath of the British post-1857. An unexpected effect of this was that the Lucknow artistic community welcomed a horde of Delhi Dastango's into their folds, and the art form which was lesser known in Lucknow was now in complete view of the city. They are said to have used city squares for their "spontaneous stories". (Context, 33) While the fervor of the revolt might have permeated to several regions in the subcontinent, none of the areas were more affected than Meerut and Delhi, since the epicenter of the revolution was located there and most of the bloodshed on both sides took place in North India. (Machwe, 53) A point to be noted in the context that we are dealing with is that literature that was written around this time was regulated and many poets and artist in general report the police interfering in their affairs and even making off with personal effects. (Machwe, 54) Even in his post-1857 writings about New Delhi, Baker refers to the new city from the view of a British Official. He goes on to describe the plans of

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

the new city and described the secretariat and the governmental buildings and is ignorant of the fact that a city is composed of more than its supposed overlords. The exact extent of 1857 is not covered simply by stating that the massacre of Sepoys occurred, but also needs to include the looting of Delhi by the British, which was essentially a sanctioned prize for their victory. (Machwe, 39)

From a Marxist perspective, the revolt of 1857 was what was to happen according to the theory of class struggle. The British were seen as the agent of change, albeit an unconscious and unintentional one, that were present in their colonies so that the people may rise and overthrow the imposed feudal rule. This in a sense also did not come to pass, since the people when they did band together to rebel did not do it as a mass of power, but rather they desired a central figure around whom to rally around and this in itself is a negation of the power to people philosophy that Marxism was supposed to produce during the revolt of the colonized. What we see instead is that language played a very vital role in the politics of Delhi and the effects of which are still perceived today. At the center of this language politics is the division that is perceived to exist between Hindi and Urdu, which is the reason for the marginalization of the language post-independence, as a major part of India felt that Urdu was equable to Muslims and that the partition was a metaphorical one, that existed in Linguistics and in Topography. (Safadi, 6) Ironically, certain scholars felt that the institution of enlightenment, or Fort William College in other words, was a tool in the divide and rule policy that the British used to gain control over the populace. (Safadi, 7) It must also not be forgotten that the policy of education that the British advocated in their colonies and the linguistic institutions that they established can also be considered to be means to gain control. (Safadi, 7) This control would have been by channels of communication that would be considered civilized at the face of things but would appear more sinister if looked at closer since it would mean that the colonial forces once they have established some semblance of dominance would now be able to elucidate their particular brand of philosophy and this in itself is a more potent force than just brute force. This politics of language that the British used to establish divide rule also resulted in the two languages that were in the public eye, Urdu and Kari Boli Hindi which were both languages that were similar and derived heavily from Sanskrit but were different in that a

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

particular context had been created for them and it divided a populace and bifurcated them. (Safadi, 8)

Society was divided in India as a result of the revolt and the partition and this was essentially because English as a language and the western way of life had come home to roost and this resulted in new classes of society or at least ideology being created. Indians were divided into those that were part of the old guard or traditionalists and then there were those that were labelled as forward thinkers. Both these aspects of society that were created caused a disturbance in the system and the colonial hand's cold touch is still felt by many, especially those that pride themselves on their Urdu heritage and feel a sense of betrayal as a result.

(Safadi, 8)

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Performance

In academia, much of the research that exists on Dastangoi is focused on Dastans rather than on the performance of them. This comes as no surprise because of the dearth of literature on the elements of performance of Dastans. Ironically, Dastangoi is essentially an art form that is primarily performative rather than literary. In this sense, there is an inconsistency in the subject of focus in academia and the nature of Dastangoi. Consequently, we know little about how Dastangoi has been performed over the years in the different domiciles that it has shifted.

In Persia, the function of Dastans was artistic pleasure of the joy of Storytelling. "They existed for the sheer pleasure of the story-telling experience: created by the narrator's artistic authority, they were sustained by the listeners' responsiveness, by the perpetual question, 'Then what happened?'" ([Medieval Persian Romance, 2](#)). Dastangos performed stories from the Shah Namah, interspersed with references from folk traditions and poetry. The Dastangos applied their imaginations and narrative prowess to the frameworks offered by Dastans to improvise ornate prose to large audiences ([Medieval Persian Romance, 2](#)). Unfortunately, this facile and inadequate description marks the extent of the knowledge on the manner of performance of Dastans in medieval Persia.

The role of Akbar in this particular storytelling tradition is immense, to say the least. As we are discussing the performance aspect of the Dastangoi tradition, Akbar's artistic undertaking opted for an entirely different take on the art form. Unlike his predecessor Babur, Akbar showed a remarkable patronage for the entire spectrum of arts and crafts. This included the compilation of many of these Persian Dastans into Urdu- moreover, representations for this Dastan, complete with illustrations, costly ones at that. To understand the epic undertaking that is the Hamzanama, we need a summarized chain of events. Akbar reveled in the storytelling traditions, particularly those narrated by his personal, courtly storyteller- Durbar Khan. These were precisely the tales of Hamza. Despite Akbar's illiteracy, his imperial library was substantial and included famous works such as the Shahnameh. The year 1559 has been pinpointed to be the year when this undertaking began, and continued for about fifteen years. This Hamzanama consists of text along with

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

illustrations, organized in an episodic manner. Each folio is sizable, with the dimensions of 27 by 20 inches.

To grasp its magnitude, it suffices to say that 1400 of these folios comprised the Hamzanama. This was not a purely literary, or artistic undertaking though. Its performative implications were far greater, as it served as an aid to the Oral Storytelling activities which were already prevalent. What was hence created out of a verisimilitude of artistic influences was then used to create the ultimate, first of its kind sensory experience- "an audio-visual treat". (Farooqui, interview)

In the latter half of the 19th century, Dastangoi had become one of the most popular art forms in North India, particularly in Lucknow, Delhi and Rampur. Additionally, its proliferation wasn't limited to any class of society. Consequently, even local performative styles had begun developing in these cities (Dastan of Amir Hamza in Oral Narration, 2). In Delhi, Dastans were said to be simple and short, in Lucknow, they were highly ornate and lengthy and Rampur is supposed to have been influenced by the Lucknow style. Lucknow became the hotbed of Dastangoi, especially after the rebellion of 1857. There, there were almost daily public performances by Dastangos in 'Chowks', starting when the lamps were lit. The elite had their private performances and even private Dastangos. Opium users frequently accompanied their substance-induced leisure with Dastangoi (Dastan of Amir Hamzah in Oral Narration, 2).

Unfortunately, there is very little knowledge about the elements of performance of Dastans in North India. The only Dastango that we do have accounts of is Mir Baqar Ali, the longest surviving Dastango from the North Indian tradition. He possessed an extraordinary memory and utilized it to its full potential in his performance. In addition to this, he had an impressive command over Urdu and an eloquence about him that breathed life into his words. He knew countless verses by heart and consequently, his Dastans were extremely long. Some accounts claim that they even went on for as long as ten or twelve years. He would consume his customary dose of opium and perform for hours. His Dastans were ornate and were embellished with impeccable detail. For example, an account claims that:

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

"If he began to enumerate the names of weapons, then he named thousands....the same with ornaments and jewellery, in fact with everything. In short, he was an encyclopaedia of knowledge" (Dastan of Amir Hamzah in Oral Narration, 3).

There are anecdotal accounts of Mir Baqar Ali's performative style, but there is not enough literature on it to arrive at a comprehensive description. However, common elements in these accounts do reveal some probable elements. Firstly, his use of his memory and knowledge in the form of recitation of catalogues (of jewellery, weapons, medicine, etc.) and insertion of verses of poetry is ubiquitous in accounts of his performances. Additionally, there are several references to his use of opium or marijuana while performing. In fact, it has even been claimed that he would only perform under the influence. It seems that these substances were quite a feature in the Dastangoi community of Mir Baqar Ali's time and possibly, in the culture of that time in general (Dastan of Amir Hamzah in Oral Narration, 3).

Extrapolating the elements of Mir Baqar Ali's performances to Dastangos of the time in general would be a fallacy. However, it is clear that by this time the skill of impromptu Dastan construction had acquired significant value and currency. It had become a part of the skill set that a Dastango needed to imbibe. In comparison, earlier Dastangos usually narrated scripted Dastans (M.Farooqui, 2011 pp. 32). However, what remained familiar even in the 19th century were the structure and themes of the Dastans. This familiarity has not percolated into Farooqui's troupe and has instead metamorphosed into Dastans with contemporary themes and a liberal attitude towards experimentation with structure.

Confronted by his desire to revive Dastangoi, Mehmood Farooqui found himself dealing with various elements of the performance which the text did not mention, building his revival through innovation and the study of past records. Since he had to start with a blank slate on anything apart from the stories themselves, he decided to involve two performers on stage instead of the traditional one in order to share the collective energy of the performance and take the place of the non-urdu speaking and hence unresponsive audience they would be performing for. He began with very little idea of the practical aspects of the art itself, such as the appropriate wardrobe, setting, background, sitting position, movement and the expectations from the

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

audience. Anusha Rizvi, Mehmood's wife and the set and décor designer saw these shortcomings as a chance to innovate with a free hand, adopting an angarkha, a 19th century outfit associated with Islamic communities. The white angarkha has since become a staple for Dastangoi performances, integral to the performer's identity as a Dastango. There is no music, no props and no props apart from the staple katoras (water bowls), candles and the traditional volume of the 'Hamzanama'. The proscenium theatre approach was necessary to focus all of the audience's attention to the two performers. The minimalistic simplicity of this setup is meant to simulate the chowks, Masjids and durbars of the earlier Dastangos where the environment would no longer matter as the audience is mesmerized by the storytellers, their surrounding world fading to give way to the fantasy of the Dastan. Since the practice of traditional Dastangoi is still an unfinished jigsaw puzzle, the troupe adds their own pieces to the art, evolving it into its modern iteration unbarred, the absence of any puritanism aiding this evolution. While the traditional Dastango's seemingly improvised stories and based their performances entirely on recitation, the troupe now uses modern light and sound systems, making their facial expressions and micro-movements a part of the act. Where earlier the audience knew the context and linguistic nuances of the stories, the audiences of today are handicapped, making it necessary for the performers to acquaint them with both the art form and the mythos surrounding the stories. The presence of non-Urdu speakers in the audience meant that the content had to move from elaborate descriptions to simpler language and elements of humour. The contemporary Indian audience does not speak ornate Urdu but is still able to identify the beauty of the words and the tone of the storyteller giving them enough of an understanding to enjoy the performance and join the Dastangos in their jest (Farooqui, 2011, 34).

Another fear which often pervades modern Dastangos is their inability to improvise. Embellishing the text with their own additions would also mean trying to improvise on something which was already written down to be said. Moreover, without improvisation, holding the audience captive with their flair seems to be a hindrance. The nature of Dastangoi will then become monotonous- and as Farooqui indicates, many of the modifications they made kept the audience's comfort and enjoyment at the maximum. (Farooqui, Interview)

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

To counterbalance this monotony, one extremely simple task they performed was the incorporation of the second narrator, who would act as chorus, conversationalist, and since the audience was in no position to do so, engage in a back and forth humorous/inquisitive argument/rebuttal, which would maximize their existing acting capabilities. Secondly, by relying on the text and merely providing an introduction, something they now entitle the "Saki-nama". This introduction provides the context of the Dastan, which then makes it easier for the audience to absorb, for they know the plot; despite their difficulty understanding the high complexity of pure Urdu, a language rarely spoken in practice today. Sitting down and performing is extremely restrictive for modern day Dastangos, for most of them are trained in traditional styles of theatre and acting. This makes them use their torso the most, and the resulting adaptivity may take months to get accustomed to. (Husain, interview)

There is also an inherent absenteeism of patronage, as shows are performed not for one particular ruler or agency, but rather multiple parties in different areas of the country. One may have the misconception that this may result in the lack of incentive for the Dastango, but Manu Sikander dismisses this notion, by citing that performances commissioned by established theatres and so on may guarantee income in the excess of Rs.5 Lacs per performance. (Sikander, Interview) There do not exist any households which transmit the storytelling tradition to their children, or there is no special importance ascribed to the title of "storyteller". Hence, one can claim that as far as the institution of theatre is concerned, Dastangoi may just be an extremely novel way of the acting medium, and this experimental form of theatre was worth dabbling into.

The Dastans used by Mehmood Farooqui's troupe are not restricted to the traditional Hamza narrative anymore. The troupe has begun the creation of Dastans relevant to the contemporary times, addressing topics like the revival of Dastangoi itself and the Partition of India. They have also adopted stories from different parts of the country into the Dastan framework to create an Urdu rendition of folk tales like the Rajasthani 'Chouboli' and Rabindranath Tagore's novel, 'Ghare Baire'. The format of the performance is more than mere storytelling, it makes the act of narration ceremonial and captivating, despite the complexity of the language being lost on the unenlightened audience. Dastangoi has become more than just a recitation and a

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

source of information, it has become a preservation of the art of active listening, a skill fading away from our mostly visual culture. (Farooqui, 2011, 35).

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The Essence Of an Art Form

Farooqi is an artist. So are Danish, Darian, Ankit, Poonam and Fouzia. They are artists because they call themselves so, and by popular consensus, the world in general and the world of art in specific have accepted that they are artists and have deemed that the product of their imagination can be termed art. What is meant to be explored here is the very idea of how these individuals and other exceptional individuals have come to be artist and the unsaid rules that move around the world of art like crabs in a beach, popping up and nipping us on the big toe. Lind and his Aesthetics of Art describes how and why certain works and artists get the recognition of being an artist and others do not. (Lind, 118) The question of legitimacy is what we are essentially getting at here. S.R. Farooqi is a world-renowned scholar and his convincing his nephew, Mahmood Farooqi is what drove the latest stage of revival/reinvention (this is another concern that we will shortly get into). The question of legitimacy of course, is answered here. It is essentially an Urdu art form and who better to legitimize its claim in the modern world than one of the foremost scholars of Urdu himself. Our next point of contention also ties in with the idea of the politics of art, since we are now to question the fact that art does not exist in itself, but in fact exists only in the statement that it makes and in the opposition that it presents to the world. (Lind, 118) Art in itself would serve only the purpose of form, and many theorists and scholars (Danto, according to Lind) claim that a very basic assumption that one makes when they call something art is that it has to make a statement and have a purpose. (Lind, 117) By purpose here we do not mean that it has to have any practical sense in the classical sense, but rather that it must have a certain function. Hegelian discourse and that of his "successor" (Hilmer, 72), Danto, are of use here when we talk of the function and the metaphysical qualities of art. The almost-philosophical nature of art itself lends itself to these epistemologists to decipher. Along this Danto's tangential theory is that art is on a quest of self-awareness and that the function of art in and of itself is to uncover its own meaning. (Hilmer, 73) Dastangoi as an art form is a proponent of the times that it has come from. In itself it serves the purpose of transmitting information and as a device of entertainment, but this is where the phenomenon itself stops being something which is purely pragmatic in nature and transcends its boundaries into the realm of art. As

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

an art then it flourished in the durbars of Persian rulers, and consequently in Mughal India. In both these spaces it served the purpose of entertaining the shah, but again none of these in itself implies that it can be considered an art form. By Danto's reckoning, art is consistent throughout the cognizant history of human beings, and this is what is defined as the essentialist approach to the philosophy of art. (Kelly, 31) Another stand that is opposed in essence to the aesthetic appreciation of art harks back to Danto's idea of the function of art, and it is the significance of that particular art to certain individuals. Art consists of various indicators that could be made out to be signboards on the road to a discovery of some sort, and this particular pot of gold is what the artist is pointing the audience towards. The value of a work of art many theorists think lies in the significance of the art itself, and thus they distance themselves in a sense from a formalist understanding of art. (Molnar, 24)

Finally there is the almost overly simplified and over used idea that idea is eternally subjective and the post-modern discourse on what art is and what is art. This last idea as has been mentioned is overtly simple when it comes to analyzing a certain work of art. Dastangoi exists in our present understanding of things simply because its existence is deemed to be the nexus of the socio-political. Dastangoi fits a certain need in that it presents an opposition to normalized entertainment and art and this leads us to the question of its significance. Its significance lies in the people who practice this art form and the audience who interact with them by attending their shows. Their politics as it were are not covert, but on the contrary are overt.

Additionally, Folnar in his paper says that upon experimentation, the need for empiricism in art is lost and we come closer to a "science of art" (in his own words) and upon our arrival at this juncture, the subjectivity of art that is widely said to be its main tenant is lost and judgments can thus only be made on the finer points of art, thus making it more streamlined and scientific. (Molnar, 25) Though he does make an error in rubbishing personal taste. It is precisely that which makes us appreciate art and feel it in the bottom of our bones, which is a feeling that he only needs to feel once more, so that it remind him that he is human.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

On Storytelling Art Forms

There are different types of art forms and they all could be defined as distinct, or at least having very fuzzy lines that buffer them from each other. Regardless of how they are defined in relation to each other, they do of course use different mediums and different ways of making their presence felt. This is the essential distinction that we find between art forms. Form and style come secondary. Before there was the written word, there was the spoken words and it is within this that meaning was conveyed and received.

Axiomatically, or rather obviously, this was also how it was altered and re-transmitted. Seeing as there was no exclusivity involved in this, or rather no authority, it meant that there could be almost no constraint to the nature and content of the story. Our histories, or the ones that we as a society refer to now, are the annals of the ones who won the bidding war when the written word came around, since it meant the official stamp of authority. Also with the oral tradition comes a reliance on the human function for its accuracy and transmission. The oral document that is transmitted from generation to generation can and has been changed and altered because the human mind is not flawless. (Spear, 133) Apart from this there are a couple of key element that set storytelling as an art apart from the rest. Since it is minimalist in nature, it requires a level of spontaneity and a connection with the audience. As much as we claim that spontaneity is the essence of an art, in every story there is a core and that must be maintained for the story to have longevity. By longevity, we mean that for the story to be recognized for generations and for there to be a connection with the original rendition, so to speak, there must something that must be maintained, the kernel of the story. (Groff, 273) Form of course comes after and this is another matter.

To storytelling as with other art forms there is also the question of context. When an art form exists and is practiced, it is known and perceived only with context. To add to this, is what Mahmood Farooqi told us to be the function of a Dastango in antiquity. His art was for the sake of art and to a lesser extent it was for the sake of information. A Dastango was said to have been go on for hours and be exhaustive about any particular subject, be it jewelry or the scene of war. Storytelling art forms in general too suffer from this, in that there is on some level a very practical function to them, that of the transmission of information that has

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

been accumulated in the minds of human beings for centuries. There is a very thin line between an art and something of pure practical use to us as a society and storytelling art forms toe that line.

A storyteller has only himself for a friend and this affects his performance. We must observe here that our observations of storytelling traditions and storytellers in general is slightly westernized and many of the standards that we sometimes use to analyze a particular phenomenon are done with one eye turned to the west. A good example is how art in general is evaluated, wherein abstract form and individual expression are of the highest order. (Hart, 146) Hart and her essay on aesthetic pluralism is useful when we come to the question of evaluating a particular art form, and it also points towards a more personal understanding of art rather the archaic ideal of western art. Coming back to the storytelling arts, we see that since they have originated in a completely different context, we must begin to understand that context in order to better function with them, in an academic sense. Storytelling arts that originated in Asia and Africa in general have strong ties to the community. The Tiv of Nigeria have a tradition of preserving their genealogies in their oral tradition, and anthropological studies on this and other traditions are indicators of storytelling art forms in general. The kinks and quirks of ever one of these traditions says something about the society that it came from. To explain this further, in this example, we shall consider the Tiv of Nigeria. Their reverence to their ancestors is obvious, but it is subjective. Once a person is out of mind, and out of sight, so to speak, they leave that part of their genealogical tree free to be interpreted and changed. (Harms, 65) The American India tradition of storytelling is also a phenomenon that has been explored and researched to a considerable extent. To them, at least up until the near past, the oral stories that they possess in their nexus had considerable effect on their children and was used as a means to educate, and not only to entertain. A paper that has been written on the American Indian tradition also tells us of the communal aspect of their stories and how the entire group would be involved in remembering the story, and this dispossess the ideal of western individuality as being inapplicable in certain situations that do not concern art in the western tradition. (Celi; Ana and Boiero, 61) This communal aspect is especially interesting, because writing was a factor that did not affect the process of transmission and interaction of storytelling art forms, it could be

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

shared and the entire burden of carrying the stories and the tradition itself could be shared. The very fact that it was remembered by a large number of audience and community members meant that there was no question of autonomy and monarchical claim to the art form. (Celi; Ana and Boiero, 61) A somewhat oblique, yet critical angle to this is the fact that since the storytelling art is firmly traditional in nature, there is much in it that has the traditional values of the progenitors ingrained in them. With this comes the fact that women can often be excluded from this discourse and their voices can often be drowned out in the bass sea of male voices. The power struggle for expression that is present in other art forms is also not absent here. (Harvey, 110) In Iran, the tradition of storytelling is said to date back to the seventh century A.D. (Talebi, 49) Naghali is one form of storytelling that was popular in Iran and it consisted of specific members of the Naghal community who would be the resident story tellers of various coffee houses. Their stories were supplemented by painters too, who would hang up their creations that were centered on the stories of the Naghal. These stories were mostly from the Shahnamah, which is the National Epic of Iran. (Talebi, 50) These stories are not performed verbatim, but instead are allowed to be altered by the storytellers own personality. Another issue that is outlined in the paper by Talebi is one that was shared by Danish Husain when we interviewed him for the purposes of this project, and it is the fact that context is tough to establish and maintain. Much like a wizard who must maintain his concentration, lest his spell come undone, a storyteller (and a Dastango) must know that they have to be on their feet when performing. An audience comes into a performance with some previous experience, but not enough to warrant no introduction of the material at hand. Thus they must be told what the context of the story is and the storyteller must also make sure that the story is not repetitive and something that the audience have not experienced before, failing which his performance will fall flat. Danish went on to describe his issues with the performance of Dastangoi in modern day India as being difficult since the stories that are contained in the Hamzanama are completely devoid of context when they are told to the general populace. As a result of this, the modern Dastango must keep in mind that the audience must constantly be reminded of what they are hearing and must be taught to understand and reconcile themselves to the fact that the Dastango is calling the shots. Any miscalculation

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

and the audience could become disenchanted, and in this world of short term and highly visual entertainment, that is a possibility that is always looming, like a snake on the shoulder of an honest artist. In all this chatter that we are creating of oral traditions and concentrating on the non-physically aided parts of storytelling, it must not be forgotten that there are many storytelling traditions that also use painted aids to help them in creating the atmosphere and aiding the audience in imagining the scenes that they are talking of. This also creates a very interesting visual atmosphere that does not have to be for the sake of a crutch alone but in reality could also be a very clever tool if used right. Two examples of storytelling art forms that use visual cues are the Phad narrations of Rajasthan and Pardeh-Khani (which is of Iranian origin). (Talebi, 50) Both these above mentioned art forms use printed screens that the storyteller can carry around and unfurl as his story washes over his audience, which usually helps the younger members of the audience and pleases the more ancient ones.

To understand a particular strain of storytelling, it is necessary to look at themes that are predominant and this gives us an inkling of context. Yoruba tales use animals and even the Ashanti tradition follows this particular format and way of storytelling. Most of the Iranian storytelling forms are derived from the Shahnamah, and feature the Durbar and politics, wars and drama of similar kinds. Dastangoi in its stages picked up this particular feature as a result of the relative peace that existed in the Persian court, as Arjumand told us in her interview.

Storytelling art forms are varied and many in number, and while they share plenty of similarities, they all have a certain means to communicate with the community and the world in general. Their intricacies comes from the spaces that they come from. It is also important to remember as has been mentioned before that there must be a means to evaluate this that is removed from the western tradition of art appreciation. A pluralism in terms of aesthetics is necessary to understand those art forms that cannot be perceived in their complete form by the sometimes cloudy western eye.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The Spearhead Of Dastangoi

Farooqi has salt and pepper hair and a really nice house. He also seems like Don Corleone, calmly pulling the strings on a symphony, seeing all but never being seen, and thus perfecting the real perfect double bind on society. Of course that is just a romantic statement, and in truth he actually does perform himself, and thus is seen, but one gets the general idea. What gives him credibility in the eyes of those that hope to become Dastango's is the fact that his uncle Shamsur Rahman Farooqi was the first man or rather academic who went back to the annals of the past and pulled out the age old tradition of Dastangoi and dusted it off, making it available to a whole generation of artists to use and mold to their style and preferences. His journey culminated in the show that was conducted in May of 2005, which starred his nephew and the man behind the revival, Mahmood Farooqi. (Ahmed, Dawn.org)

In our observations on field, Farooqi was seen to be in control of the institution of Dastangoi and had a streamlined system which was effective. Younger Dastan's who were hoping to perform a show of their own would send him an e-mail and through this dialogue with him, would finalize the script and he would even help with the writing of said script and with the performance aspect of it. What this brings us to is the analysis of a system that is not often seen in the world. The sight of a single man creating a discourse on an art form. On further thought this does not seem very far from reality, as we then come to realize just how traditionalist that this system is. Now, we must not be misunderstood in this by being made out to construe that we view this in a negative light, just that a system that is this traditional has not been interacted with. The fact that Mahmood Farooqi and S.R. Farooqi have revived this art form and are the ones poised to provide assistance should be enough to convince people that they deserve autonomy over the art form, since what we have here is a question of form and the importance of form to a certain art form. (Jenson, 98) Focusing on form and not essence could be a means of understanding the traditionalist school of thinking, since the dominant mode of thought is that there is a specific form which is most at peace with the art form in its antiquity and in the eyes of the populace today and only this form could hope to find the nerve at which art can influence people. Here again it must be noted

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

that when artists and individuals who teach art stress the importance of form at certain times, it is not so that art becomes more formal, but essentially so the tools by which art can best influence people lies in the form and the fact that the essence of art is tough to touch.

The concern is that in a certain sense, how will the torch be passed on, and how effective this will be if the essentials of an art form all rest with two individuals. The Hamza romance was not written down for centuries, and even when the Hamzanama was crafted by Akbar, it was not the primary source of the art form itself. The stories and the essence of the art form was transmitted by the masters to the next generation and so on. The book on Dastangoi that has been written by Farooqi is essentially a guide book, as he has attested to himself. (Farooqi) He jokes that only reading the book would give prospective Dastango's enough information to be interested and seek more aid in understanding the art form, but would not give them enough information to become Dastango's in their own right. The institution about which we are talking consists of Farooqi and his uncle who are considered the curators of the art form. Through their relation to the world of art and theater in specific, they turned people on to the art form itself, and Farooqi found his first partner in Danish Husain, who is of considerable importance in the world of theater in India. Eventually through workshops and enough exposure, there have been a considerable number of theater artists and other individuals who have been interested who have taken it upon themselves to challenge the convoluted and exalted Urdu of the Shah's and have begun to perform and learn under the tutelage of the Farooqis.

Of course, it is not as if the word and the art form have been banned from being used by other people and artists, but there is a certain feeling that to be recognized as a Dastangoi and to gather the tools that are needed to interact with the art form, there is only place to go to, and that as much as the discourse of form can be accepted, is difficult to understand. Though we might be mistaken in having any misgivings about the entire institution because of a few simple facts. This case is like no other and this essentially because the art form is being created as we speak and has not the established rules that other art forms have the luxury of having. This is because it died with Mir Baqar Ali, the last great

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Dastango. What we see here might very well be called a reinvention of the original, and as such it does need new rules and a firm hand in being culled out from the heart of the Hamzanamah.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The Malleability of Dastangoi in context of Art Forms

To the custodians of culture and tradition in the 21st century, Dastango's have ostentatiously twiddled their thumbs. Dastangoi is tough to define and we are not even going to try to do so. What we can do is try to understand it and experience it in the form it is being presented to us and thus we shall proceed. Danish says that the concept of slotting Dastangoi into a category and calling it a story telling tradition, and by extension, pigeon holing it into forms and words, we lose out on the essence of things. This need to mark and label, he says, is the western tradition of analyzing information and institutions and in the context of "Hindustan" the way to know a certain phenomenon would have always been to immerse yourself into it and become a disciple, after which you are essentially a part of the workings of it and thus cannot divulge any information to the outside world since you are in essence then giving away the means of livelihood. This is an interesting point of view and one that is shared by a lot of artist in the sub-continent and essentially the world of the commonwealth and other western colonies since we are slowly starting to realize that it is tough to separate the real from the contrived and remain authentic. Of course this quest to remain authentic is in itself not something that only we, as a country that is confused, strive for, it is also the sign of any intellect, as this would essentially be the only form of a truly aware society, one that starts noticing itself and can live with the realization that it is necessary to do so. We digress though, the purpose of this is to talk of Dastangoi, and henceforth, we will refer to it as an art form, even though Dastango's themselves might not agree to it, for the sake of western tradition and sanity.

An art form arises out of a certain context and we must go back to it to get an idea of how it was born and how the different characteristics of the art form came about. Storytelling art forms in general arose as a means to keep information locked in the community and to not let it seep into the void of death with the passing of different members of the community. This served the purpose of saving information and also transmitting said information, additionally it was also a means to educate and entertain the younger members of society. As Bloch speaks of in his paper, there is much credibility that can be attributed to the statement that there is much to be gained in understanding an art form sociologically (Bloch, 315) and not

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

simply by analyzing its elements and making causal relations to that which exist around it. Though it is also a truism that any statement ever made could be a sociological one. In Danish and Farooqi's words Dastangoi as an art form is much more than just that. (Danish, Interview) There is much in the modern world that is fast paced and we get entertained by movies at 25 bucks a pop on our television sets sitting pretty on our couches at home, and this in a sense is what they have a problem with. Let it be known that they are aware of the fact that their statements, and by association their stand, when they speak of Dastangoi can be construed to be political and they try as they can to avoid being caught in that trap. While this is admirable and hyper-aware of them, it is tough to be an active agent in this world and avoid being political and in this sense they are being political, simply by being.

Our understanding of a storytelling tradition in the modern sense is influenced by our colonial past and our predicament as of this moment in time and as Farooqi says, there is much in Dastangoi that goes against western understandings of art and against modern understandings of entertainment. (Farooqi; Danish, Interview) As it is tough to sit through performances, he says, it forces people in a sense to appreciate the art more and as a result there are those that push themselves to make sense of the happenings and stories and as a result are enriched. The political statement here is the fact that Danish considers modern entertainment and media to be spoon feeding popular opinion to people and he sees Dastangoi as a counter force of sorts, a panacea to the modern world, if you would. The politics that we are referring to here is the fact that Dastangoi exists in our view of the world as an opposition of sorts to mainstream entertainment and American pop culture. The politics of its existence is akin to that of many smaller ideologies and institutions that exist as contemporaries with larger institutions which are more dominant. What this means is that the simple existence of these vagrant strains is in itself a political statement and a sign of dissatisfaction with the dominant state of things. (G.P.D, 1077) Another point with which we can understand the politics of art forms is the fact that their existence is in a sense a statement to colonial discourse. There are traditional art forms and there are colonial art forms and most theorists try to ascribe these labels to art forms and the resulting asphyxiation has resulted in the death of many phenomenon that could have been interesting had they been

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

allowed to express themselves. (G.P.D, 1077) Instead of ascribing tags that imply that there is a derivative nature to these phenomenon, a descriptive approach would be preferred, so that analysis can thus result in a deeper understanding of processes, rather than an a priori assumption of intellectual drought. It is because of this that we feel that gazing upon our phenomenon with a discerning yet descriptive eye so that we might understand a bit more rather than rubbish things. (Bloch, 315)

The nature of Dastangoi on the other hand is a lot more ephemeral than our previous discussion on the politics of art and the politics of Dastangoi in specific. We must try to see if Dastangoi has any elements to it that are integral for its position as an art form in its wholeness, or if certain aberrations and changes can alter it beyond recognition. For example, Urdu as a language is important to Dastangoi, since as Farooqi says, it is the language that this art form is linked to, and especially in the modern context, the fact that Urdu is a tough language to follow even within Hindi-speaking folk, makes it all the more important to Dastangoi. If the language was changed and the context was shifted to another state of India and say the clothing and the motifs that are distinctively North Indian are changed to accommodate this shift in perspective, would the art form still remain Dastangoi, or would it be something different? A hybrid art form perhaps? (Levinson, 8)

Empirical evidence that would be concerned with this experiment would yield nothing. When a transition is viewed in stages, all of them would look like art forms that were related, sort of like when cousins have a family resemblance, but a subtle one. When a curve is being plotted in math and we pull out a miniscule portion of it and differentiate it, to look at it closer, it makes sense to look at art forms that are similar with the same intensity, rather than labelling them on a continuum. If the above were true, it would mean that any addition would create art forms that were not the original and this would pose a problem for the institution of art. (Levinson, 8)

In this, we have derived from Levinson's ideal of a Hybrid and his discussion on how there could possibly be different types of hybrid arts and these divisions make it easier to understand the particulars of the situation that we are dealing with. In his paper on hybrid art forms, he outlines distinction types of hybrids, one of which is the transitional hybrid. (Levinson, 10)

Dastangoi if and when it is adapted to different regions and different countries, it might still remain the same art form except showing

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

slight inclinations of influences. It might also become a fully blown organic hybrid, but that would take a considerable amount of time and the right socio-economic group for it to be a result of the forces that be rather than a contrived effect. Of course, we are still to see how the country adapts to this art form, because it has not been taken to by a large number of the populace, primarily because of ignorance, by which I mean that they have not been made aware of it yet. Already though, there have been many changes that have been implemented. The structure of Dastangoi is such that it is relatively malleable when it comes to its constituents, deriving its strength from the performer and not from the structure of the art form itself, and this is a phenomenon that we have witnessed and the results have been nothing but favorable.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

The Current Problem.

As Dastangos today, the Delhi troupe faces problems that are directly born out of the cultural disposition of the modern context and its disagreement with the sensibility of the past. The milieu that nurtured and in turn, received the embellishments of, dastangoi before its hiatus was markedly distinct compared to the milieu that it finds itself in today. This conflict is made two-fold in that in addition to this distinction, the dastangos of today are reluctant to tailor their art form to the sensibility of today and losing the crystallized value in it from the past. Upon analysis, it becomes clear that there are three components that coalesce to engender the divorce between past and present: the loss of language, the loss of aurality and the loss of context.

"I style the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print, 'primary orality'. It is 'primary' by contrast with the 'secondary orality' of present-day high technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print. Today primary culture in the strict sense hardly exists, since every culture knows of writing and has some experience of its effects. Still, to varying degrees many cultures and sub-cultures, even in a high-technology ambiance, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality."

– Walter J. Ong in 'Orality and Literacy'.

The prime orality that Walter J. Ong mentions has been lost in the midst of an influx of visual stimulus. For a storytelling art form such as dastangoi, this is extremely counter-productive. In the age of films, TV serials and the countless screens that are ubiquitous today, the intriguing oral intricacies of dastangoi pale in stimulus. There has also been a marked difference in the concentration spans. Instant gratification seems to be the limit of the concentration of the denizens of today. The days of uninterrupted narration for hours, enchanting large crowds, are banally interrupted by a mere phone call. To accommodate these changes, the dastangos of Delhi have incorporated visual elements into their performance like décor and gesticulation. However, the art form still remains predominantly oral.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Along with the loss of an aural tradition, there has been the inevitable loss of context. In the words of Mahmood Farooqi himself, "In the past the audiences knew the stories beforehand; they were already familiar with all the tracks so each new episode could be tagged to their knowledge. When we perform now we have to acquaint them with the whole tradition and then relate the story. Like poetry, the story does not stand alone but in a dialogue with all the stories that have gone before. It is a bit like telling an episode of the 'Mahabharata' to an audience who knows nothing about the epic (Context, 34). Farooqi touches upon perhaps the most inevitable problem with restoring an art form from the past. Where Mir Baqar Ali took years to finish one dastan because the audience already knew the stories, dastangos like Farooqi and Danish have to spend some time introducing the very art form that they are going to perform and the stories they are going to perform and the characters in them.

In addition to just the knowledge, the sensibility of the past has also been lost. The sense of humour, the subtleties of expression and disposition towards issues like sex, law, religion, etc. are markedly different in the stories of the past. This culminates in a failure to communicate and in an art form that derives its sustenance from oral communication, a large source of value is lost. Danish Husain, and to an extent, Mahmood Farooqi, view this loss of sensibility as regressive. Danish comments on the decadence of modern culture as modernity has regressed into mundane trivialities of instant gratification and an obsession with banal concerns (Danish, Interview). His views are almost reminiscent of T.S Eliot's view of the modern man as an intellectually impoverished creature whose stimulation is as banal as the culture that he resides in. In his opinion, people of today have no time for intellectual pleasures of the higher order and that, unfortunately, proves to be a hindrance to dastangoi; an art form that offers so much food for thought. Mahmood Farooqi, while not as critical, shares the same opinion. He claims that "nobody can understand as seminal a text as 'Ram Charit Manas' of Tulsidas. Few understand Kabir's poetry or the legendary Krishna bhakti (devotion) of Surdas" (Context, 35). He is also referring to an impoverished sensibility of an uncultured milieu that has lost the ability to make sense of itself; in a sense, a culture that has lost the continuity of a self at all.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

"A story and a form that has been marginalised due to cultural politics, acquires political overtones when done in the present" – Mahmood Farooqi (Context, 34).

The cultural politics that M. Farooqi is referring to are complex to understand. In essence, the politics that he is referring to is the stigmatization of the Urdu language post-independence and the consequent neglect of Urdu art forms. The stigmatization of the language occurred primarily in the period immediately following independence. S.R Farooqi points out that after Independence Hindus had completely abandoned learning Urdu. The government in one fell swoop suspended this arrangement where Urdu was concerned, and Hindus also gave up studying Urdu ([The Problem of Urdu in India](#)). The first five years (1947 – 1952) in his opinion, were the worst for Urdu. "There was a conscious effort to impose Hindi and at the same time eradicate Urdu" ([The Problem of Urdu in India](#)). Urdu was removed from schools and colleges and consequently, it became taboo for the nascent generations. This stigmatization of the language and its association with Muslims and the Culture associated with Urdu art forms in turn alienated both the art forms and the people who practiced them. Shamsur Farooqi nullifies the claim the association of Urdu with 'Muslim' and 'military' by pointing out that Urdu is a language that developed due to the interaction of different languages like Persian and Arabic in the Indian Sub-Continent, in the 18th century without any association with 'militant' activities. In fact, the degree of syncretism in Urdu is so high that it is estimated that 75% of Urdu vocabulary was borrowed from Sanskrit ([Urdu Literary Culture](#)).

The absence of an inheritor of dastangoi after the death of Mir Baqar Ali was hindrance enough and the stigmatization of Urdu and dastangoi's association with the language made the prospects of a revival even bleaker. The angst at this unjust treatment of both language and the art form still persists. It isn't a surprise that the dastangos of Delhi "resist the demand to become more contemporary, to do topical stories" ([Context, 34](#)).

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

It became apparent that to the modern-day dastangos, dastangoi is the longing for a way of life, a sensibility embodied by the culture of the past. Their immersion into the variegated hues of dastans and its seeming contradiction or incompatibility with the mundane aspirations of modern life has culminated into an angst that is derived from the alienation of displacement. To the dastangos of Delhi, dastangoi represents and is an avenue into an "attitude to life", as Mahmood Farooqi puts it (Context, 35) , that is alien to the modern sensibility. Dastangoi, to the dastangos of today, provides us an opportunity, to reacquaint ourselves with our pasts. "The dastans then become the repository of our past and when presented to today's audiences these fantasies create a narrative that is independent of modernity and yet funny and fantasy-like to appeal to us" (Context, 35). Their alienation and angst is placated by the art form's ability to propel them into another time, another context, which in their view were better than present day.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Conclusion

The concept of an 'art form' itself has changed since the time that Dastangoi hails from firstly, in what constitutes art and secondly, in the economic instruments associated with art. In the past, an oral storytelling art form such as Dastangoi had substantial currency as art to the point where it reserved its place in the matrix of the day-to-day lives of the masses. Oral storytelling traditions were conventionally associated with common forms of art. Thus, it reserved its place in the spectrum of all art in line with the conventional notions of what constitutes art. Today, the spectrum of what constitutes art is much wider. It is true that this implies a heightened tolerance of forms in the arena of art, but at the same time, it is also true that oral storytelling traditions place themselves as antecedents to modern forms of art in the spectrum mentioned above. Consequently, in the midst of film, TV, Video Games and the like, Dastangoi appears to be an ancestor rather than a competitor. Secondly, the function of art in modern societies has also undergone a transformation in the midst of the time dilation and explosion of stimulus that modernity has bequeathed upon man. Art, no longer, serves the purpose of entertaining large public gatherings in open spaces for hours on end and it is no longer the source of leisure in the 'durbars' of Emperors. Today, a performing art such as theatre is confined within the walls of a modern day theatre and within a time period economically appropriate for a busy audience. A performing art such as Dastangoi reaches out like it used to only in communities dedicated to or engaged in art.

The combination of all the changes mentioned above means that being a Dastango means something entirely different today. Most importantly, the economic instruments associated with generating livelihoods for Dastangos have changed due the dissonance in the antiquity of Dastangoi itself and the modernity of the context that it finds itself in. The Dastangos of today must accommodate economic circumstances markedly different from those in the past. This is so, firstly because the scope for sustenance through art forms in general looks bleak compared to the past; and secondly, because the current entourage of Dastangos have no patronage backing them. They must execute the ordeal of restarting the tradition and making it

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

economically feasible amidst competition from conventional modern art forms in an economy which offers very little respite to begin with. The furtherance of Dastangoi depends majorly upon the survival of the Dastangos who are trying so hard to restore it. Then the question of whether Dastangoi will survive and flourish must be synonymous with "will the Dastangos survive?"

As of now, most of the Dastangos in Delhi except Mehmood Farooqui, Danish Husain and Ankit Chaddha still maintain jobs to sustain themselves and dedicate the other half of their lives to Dastangoi. Revenue is generated through shows and workshops that train new Dastangos. In these workshops, on an average, 3 or 4 out of 25 are ready to make the extreme commitment required to be a Dastango in the current situation. As far as shows are concerned, they receive anywhere between 1 lakh and 5 lakhs per show and usually, they end up doing 1-2 shows per week. According to Farooqui and Danish, the prospects of becoming a full-time Dastango look promising now, but at the same time it inevitably requires sacrifice.



Danish Husain, Dastango.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermilion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Dastangoi and the tradition of dastans have witnessed quite a journey from Persia to the Mughal Empire to the North Indian cities of Lucknow, Delhi and Rampur to its demise. Along the way, a rich canon of enchanting stories of war, magic, trickery and romance, a long line of Dastangos with an uncanny ability to innovate, and a long line of dedicated scholars and publishers have all coalesced to crystallize what Dastangoi is. The Delhi troupe of Dastangos has given Dastangoi a second chance and whether subsequent generations experience the art form or not depends on the efforts of this troupe. As it stands, their efforts have come to fruition, but if the unexpected were to happen, the rich treasury of the tradition of dastans, that have much more to do with who we are as denizens of the Indian sub-continent than we might think, will be lost to the archives of history and with it, so will a part of our footsteps as a people.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Interviews – Dastangos: Mohammed Farooqui
- Fouzia Dastango
- Manu Sikander
- Danish Husain
- Darain Shahidi
- Poonam Girdhani
- Ankit Chadha
- Interviews – Scholars: Dr. Arjumand
- Prof. Abu Bakr Abbad.

Secondary Sources

- "National Storytelling Network." Storynet.org, n.d. Web. 28 Feb 2014.
 - <http://Dastangoi.blogspot.in/2009_09_01_archive.html>
 - <<http://www.storynet.org/resources/whatisstorytelling.html>>
- Alexenberg, Melvin. "A Semiotic Taxonomy of Contemporary Art Forms". Studies in Art Education, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 7-12. National Art Education Association, 1976. Web.
- Anwar, Ajaz. "Lahore and Delhi Two Sides of a Mirror". India International Centre Quarterly, Vol. 24, No. 2/3, Crossing Boundaries, pp. 274-283. India International Centre, 1997. Web.
- Baker, Herbert. "The New Delhi". Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce: London, July 2nd, 1926. Web
- Banerjee, Utpal. "The Subtle Art of Story Telling". Indian Literature, Vol. 52, No. 4 (246), pp. 147-152. Sahitya Akademi, 2008. Web.
- Bloch, Herbert. "Towards the Development of a Sociology of Literary and Art-Forms". American Sociological Review, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 313-320. American Sociological Association, 1943. Web.
- Celi, Ana & Boiero, Maria Cristina. "The Heritage of Stories: A Tradition of Wisdom". American Studies International, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 57-72. Mid-America American Studies Association, 2002. Web.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

- Cohen, David W. "The Undefining of Oral Tradition". Ethnohistory, Vol. 36, No. 1, Ethnohistory and Africa, pp. 9-18. Duke University Press, 1989. Web.
- Deshpande, Sudhanva. "Bilingualism, Theatre, and the Fate of the Vernacular". Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 44, No. 36, pp. 74-75. Economic and Political Weekly, 2009. Web.
- Farooqui, Mehmood, 2009. Web. 28 Feb 2014.
- Farooqui, Musharraf Ali. "The Poetics of Amir Hamza's World: Notes on the Ghalib Lakhnavi/Abdullah Bilgrami Version." The Annual of Urdu Studies 24.1 (2009): 90-97. Print.
- Farooqui, Musharraf Ali. "The Simurgh-Feather Guide to the Poetics of Dastan-e Amir Hamza Sahibqiran." The Annual of Urdu Studies 15.1 (2000): 119-167. Print.
- Farooqui, Musharraf. "The Simurgh-Feather Guide to the Poetics of Dastan-e Amir Hamza Sahibqiran." *Dastan-e Amir Hamza Sahibqiran*. Trans. Musharraf Farooqui. n.d. 120-122. Print. February 2014.
- Farouqi, Ather. "The Problem of Urdu in India-Political or Existential? An Interview with S.R. Faruqi." *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 10.1 (1995): 157-167. Print.
- G. P. D. "Politics of Art-Forms". Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 26, No. 17, p. 1077. Economic and Political Weekly, 1991. Web.
- Groff, Patrick. "Let's Update Storytelling". Language Arts, Vol. 54, No. 3, pp. 272-277, 286. National Council of Teachers of English, 1977. Web.
- Hale, Thomas. "From the Griot of Roots to the Roots of Griot." *Oral tradition* (1997): 249-251. Print. February 2014.
- Hamid, Farooq. "Storytelling Techniques in the "Maṣnavī-yi Ma'navī" of Mowlana Jalal Al-Din Rumi." *Iranian studies* (1999): 28. print. February 2014.
- Handler, Richard, and Jocelyn Linnekin. "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious." The Journal of American Folklore 97.385 (1984): 273-290. Print.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

- Harms, Robert. "Oral Tradition and Ethnicity". The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Vol. 10, No.1, pp. 61-85. The MIT Press, 1979. Web.
- Hart, Lynn M. "Aesthetic Pluralism and Multicultural Art Education". Studies in Art Education, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 145-159. National Art Education Association, 1991. Web.
- Harvey, Clodagh, B. "Some Irish Women Storytellers and Reflections on the Role of Women in the Storytelling Tradition". Western Folklore, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 109-128. Western States Folklore Society, 1989. Web.
- Heckman, John. "From Telling Stories to Writing". MLN, Vol. 86, No. 6, Comparative Literature, pp. 858-872. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971. Web.
- Heywood, Simon. "Informant Disavowal and the Interpretation of Storytelling Revival". Folklore, Vol. 115, No. 1, pp. 45-63. Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of Folklore Enterprises, Ltd, 2004. Web.
- Hilmer, Brigitte. "Being Hegelian after Danto". History and Theory, Vol. 37, No. 4, Theme Issue 37: Danto and His Critics: Art History, Historiography and After the End of Art, pp. 71-86. Wiley for Wesleyan University, 1998. Web.
- Jāh, Muḥammad Ḥusain, and Musharraf Farooqui. Hoshrubā, the land and the tilism = Tilism-e hoshrubā. Noida: Random House India, 2009. Print.
- Jensen, O. C. "The Autonomy of Art". Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory, No. 5, pp. 97-101. Berghahn Books, 1953. Web.
- Jha, Muhammed Husain. "Tilism-e Hoshrubā (An Extract from Book One)." Annuals of Urdu Studies 21.1 (2006): 238. Print.
- Kelly, Michael. "Essentialism and Historicism in Danto's Philosophy of Art". History and Theory, Vol. 37, No. 4, Theme Issue 37: Danto and His Critics: Art History, Historiography and After the End of Art, pp. 30-43. Wiley for Wesleyan University, 1998. Web.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

- Kennedy, David. "The Art of the Tale: Story-Telling and History Teaching". The History Teacher, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 319-330. Society for History Education, 1998. Web.
- Lahiri, Nayanjot. "Commemorating and Remembering 1857: The Revolt in Delhi and Its Afterlife". World Archaeology, Vol. 35, No. 1, The Social Commemoration of Warfare, pp. 35-60. Taylor & Francis, Ltd. 2003. Web.
- Lahiri, Nayanjot. Commemorating and Remembering 1857: The Revolt in Delhi and Its Afterlife. Taylor and Francis: June 2003, Oxfordshire. Web
- Levinson, Jerrold. "Hybrid Art Forms". Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 5-13. University of Illinois Press, 1984. Web.
- Lieberman, Philip. "The Evolution of Human Speech." *Current Anthropology* 48 (2007): 43. February 2014.
- Lind, Richard. "The Aesthetic Essence of Art". The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp. 117-129. Wiley on behalf of The American Society for Aesthetics, 1992. Web.
- Machwe, P. 1857 and Indian Literature. Sahitya Akademi: New Delhi, October 1957. Web
- McKendry, Eugene. "An Introduction to Storytelling, Myths and Legends." *BBC Northern Ireland learning* n.d.: 1-4. Document. February 2014.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/schools/11_16/storyteller/pdf/gen_notes_all.pdf>.
- Molnar, F. "Experimental Aesthetics or the Science of Art". Leonardo, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 23-26. The MIT Press, 1974. Web.
- Omotoso, Sam. "Storytelling: A Cherished Cultural Heritage in Nigeria". Language Arts, Vol. 55, No. 6, pp. 724-727. National Council of Teachers of English, 1978. Web.
- Pati, Biswamoy. Historians and Historiography: Situating 1857. Economic and Political Weekly: May 12, 2007

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

- Pocock, Guy. "Story-Telling and Story-Writing". Journal of the Royal Society of Arts, Vol. 88, No. 4555, pp. 412-414. Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, 1940. Web.
- Sabnani, Nina. "The Kaavad storytelling tradition of Rajasthan." *Design thoughts* (2009): 28. print.
- Shafi, Syed S. "Delhi: Many Windows in Time and Space". India International Centre Quarterly, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 127-135. India International Centre, 2002. Web.
- Sharma, Satish. "Imperial Delhi: Imagined, Imaged, Iconized". India International Centre Quarterly, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 27-37. India International Centre, 2006. Web.
- Singh, Gurbhagat. "The 1857 Rising: A Cultural Perspective". Indian Literature, Vol. 53, No. 1 (249), pp. 177-182. Sahitya Akademi, 2009. Web.
- Spear, Thomas. "Oral Traditions: Whose History?". The Journal of Pacific History, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 133-148. Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1981. Web.
- Srivastava, Sanjay. "Urban Spaces, Disney-Divinity and Moral Middle Classes in Delhi". Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 44, No. 26/27, pp. 338-345. Economic and Political Weekly, 2009. Web.
- Talebi, Niloufar. "'Memory of a Phoenix Feather': Iranian Storytelling Traditions and Contemporary Theater". World Literature Today, Vol. 83, No. 4, pp. 49-53. University of Oklahoma, 2009. Web.
- Wasi, Muriel. "Theatre at Delhi Today". Indian Literature, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 145-150. Sahitya Akademi, 1958. Web.
- Wilshire, S. J. "The Normative Structure of Art". The Review of Metaphysics, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 415-431. Philosophy Education Society Inc., 1986. Web.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama

Photo Credits

- Hamzanama Illustration - http://homepage.univie.ac.at/ebba.koch/16jh/hamzanama_1_full.jpg
- All other pictures have been procured and shot by the photographers in the group.

The cupbearers of nocturnal revelries...the bibbers from the cup of inspiration...pour the vermillion wine of inscription...into the paper's goblet thus... Mir Ahmed Ali, The Saki-Nama