The Story of Sarwan and Farijan as told variously by the people of Punjab

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Translator's Preface

Sarwan and Farijan[1] tells the story of the murder of the British Resident to the Mughal court, William Fraser (Farijan/Faridan/Pharijan), and his improper conduct with an Indian woman, Sarwan. Although I choose to refer to it as improper conduct, during the colonial era, it was utterly normal for colonial officers to take on Indian wives and concubines, possibly against the women's will, as this tale suggests.[2] The Sarwan story, which has three different versions and forms (one short story and two songs), comes to us from oral accounts collected by another colonial British officer, Sir Richard Carnac Temple.[3] The short story explicitly mentions Fraser's murder that occurred in 1835, whereas the two songs focus on Farijan's forceful abduction of Sarwan. Temple transliterated and translated over 50 stories, including that of Sarwan and Farijan, into a three-volume collection he titled *The Legends of the Panjâb*.[4] The British Library in London houses the original manuscripts of these stories, and this translation draws

[1] The authorship is not clear for each one since they were told orally, but from the notes in the manuscript, we find that Richard Carnac Temple's *munshi* copied down the first version from the words of a farmer in Karnal (present-day India) on February 22, 1884. The second version is from Lala Ganeshi Lal, a banker from Ambala, who shared the song with Temple in 1883, although it is not clear if he is the author. The final version is from the Nawab of Loharu, Alauddin Ahmad Khan, who presented this version in 1872 to another colonial officer, J. G. Delmerick, who passed it on to Temple.

[2] There is also much evidence in scholarly literature that speaks to William Fraser's particular interest in "native" women and mentions one of his other mistresses, Amiban, with whom he had children as well. He chose to conceal this fact from his parents. For more information, see Mildred Archer and Toby Falk, *India Revealed: The Art and Adventures of James and William Fraser, 1801–35* (Cassell, 1989), 18. This page also includes a possible illustration of her.

[3] R. C. Temple was born in India to another colonial administrator, Sir Richard Temple (who was once governor of the Bombay Presidency.) R .C. Temple was posted as cantonment magistrate for the British Indian Army in the Punjab Province during the 1870s and 1880s and then moved to Burma. He was editor and manager of *The Indian Antiquary* journal among many other publications.

[4] The version I am consulting is Richard Carnac Temple, *The Legends of the Panjâb*, 3 vols. (Arno Press, 1977). The stories were first published between 1884 and 1900 by Education Society's Press (Bombay) and Trübner & Co. (London).

directly from these manuscripts, written down primarily by Temple's *munshi* or secretary, Chaina Mull, in the late 1800s.[5]

I am choosing to disregard Temple's translation since he foregrounds many of the stories with a specific, colonial contextualization and with British officers and Victorian audiences in mind.[6] The Sarwan and Farijan story, as well as the larger collection, representing folklore in 1800s Punjab, allows us to imagine a particular public sphere that was forming in colonial India, in which the British officers were becoming a part of the landscape along with other Indian characters, such that folklore and other tales began to incorporate them.

My intent here is to foreground the story that provides an alternative historical account, which stands in opposition to the colonial court inquiry and ruling around Fraser's murder, as well as Temple's introduction to the story. In the official record cited by Temple, the murder was found to be due to "personal spite" instigated by the Nawab of Loharu,[7] Shamsuddin Khan, on March 22, 1835, but undertaken by a hired assassin, Karim Khan.[8] However, these stories, especially version 1, which is narrated by a local farmer, tell us that the cause may have been Fraser's forceful abduction of Sarwan, who was already married to another man. Moreover, Temple disparagingly mentions that the songs from versions 2 and 3 were especially popular among courtesans and that they also sang in praise of Fraser's killer. This further speaks to the account popular with the masses,[9] especially women, whose opinions and histories are often overlooked, and we may not have had access to these voices without these tales. The folklore recorded here gives us access to these

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[5] Manuscript notes for Richard Carnac Temple's book *The Legends of the Panjâb* consisting of the original documents for volumes I and II as copied down chiefly in Punjabi (mostly in Persian script) and Urdu by clerks employed by Temple, 1800s, MSS Eur F98/4, India Office Records and Private Papers, British Library.

[6] He writes, for example, about the utility of some of the stories for understanding and passing the language exams for British officials in the subcontinent.

[7] Loharu was a small princely state near Jind, in the Delhi Division.

[8] Both Shamsuddin and Karim Khan were executed for Fraser's murder. Temple, *Legends of the Panjâb*, 2:365.

[9] The title of version 1 specifically says it is "an account of the common people."

alternative voices and histories. All of this helps us imagine a rich Islamicate space in 19th-century North India that had various players and political powers, diversity of opinion, linguistic multiplicity, complex ties to religion, and so much more.

Oral storytelling[10] was a well-established mode of narration within India that entered the global market and discourse through print media. Translations of "indigenous" or "native" tales and/or religion and religious discourse were required reading for colonial officers who were either already in the subcontinent or were training to serve in South Asia, since they needed to understand the minds and practices of their subjects. There was also a need to classify and simplify diverse genres and languages into something easily digestible. For instance, Temple calls his collection the *The Legends of the Panjâb*, but a number of them are not in the Punjabi language and instead represent languages from across the territory administered as Punjab at the time, including Haryanvi, Baloch, Sirmori, Kyonthali, and so on. "Sarwan and Farijan" is primarily narrated in Urdu/Hindi and what could be understood as Haryanvi dialects of Punjabi, adding variety to the linguistic and social scene and highlighting differences between current conceptions of region and language (since Haryana was not formed until 1966) and the ones prevalent in the 19th-century pre-partition, colonial India.[11]

The Sarwan story reflects a unique cultural amalgamation that occurred in the Islamicate space of 19th-century North India. The songs mention that Fraser worshipped the five pirs/saints (*pānchon pīr manāye*). This is a common theme across various characters in different stories from folklore collections from the Punjab and refers to five Sufi saints who were popular in Punjab and North India.[12]

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[10] Kahani, Hikayat, Geet, Qissa, Waar, Swang, etc. are just some genres of storytelling mentioned in the manuscript.

[11] The present-day Indian state of Haryana was considered a part of Punjab at the time.

[12] According to Alauddin Ahmad Khan, the writer of version 3 who was a later Nawab of Loharu, they were "Qutbuddin [Bakhtiar Kaki], Muinuddin [Chisti], Nizamuddin [Auliya], Nasiruddin Shah [Hussain Shahi?], and Nasiruddin Mahmud, Son of Iltumish." Manuscript notes, 318. Generally, they are said to be Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, Muinuddin Chisti, Fariduddin Ganjshakar, Bahauddin Zakariya, and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (or sometimes Nizamuddin Auliya).

Moreover, accounts of Fraser during his post in Delhi mention that he had "gone native" because he kept a beard and was vegetarian.[13] Through these details from the stories and other personal accounts, readers can ascertain that Fraser may have believed in and adopted aspects of Islam or Hinduism (the Sufi saints were worshipped and venerated across the faiths), in addition to his Scottish Protestant beliefs.[14] Versions 2 and 3 also create a juxtaposition between Indian dress and customs and English ones by telling Sarwan to forget her previous customs and habits and adopt the Western ones. Version 2 even tells Faridan (Fraser) to take on Indian customs, which highlights the exchange between cultures and practices that resulted from the colonial encounter. In the translation, I chose to keep the original words for the dress—for example, *lehenga* or *dhoti*—with footnotes to denote what they mean to intentionally provide the reader with a feel for the original language.

There are countless other aspects and details that can be ascertained from the folkloric tales, but it is my hope that the three versions of this story allow for a glimpse into this complex Islamicate world and invite the reader to explore its various intricacies and intersections that defied strict boundaries.

[13] A British lady, Lady Nugent, is shocked "by their beards and the fact that they had given up eating pork or beef. She reproved them for being 'as much Hindoo as Christian' and reminded them of the 'religion they were brought up to.'" Archer and Falk, *India Revealed*, 16.

[14] French botanist Victor Jacquemont wrote, "He [William] has six or seven legitimate wives, but they all live together, some fifty leagues from Delhi and do as they like. He must have as many children as the King of Persia, but they are all Hindu or Moslems according to the religion of their mamas." Quoted in Archer and Falk, *India Revealed*, 18.

Translations

Version 1. The account of the murder of Farijan Saab as per the account of the common people

[*Orally told by Maan Singh, a zamindar (landholder/farmer) from Nighdu/Naghdu, in the district of Karnal*[15].]

Ami Chand, an extremely handsome landholder from the village of Ghughana,[16] in the Karnal district, had been imprisoned for some reason. In the year that the canal was being dug[17] in Karnal, Sahib Bahadur [Farijan] went to inspect the ongoing work. There he saw Ami Chand digging dirt [for the canals]. Upon seeing him, he called for the prison warden and said to him, "Look what a pity it is that such a beautiful young man has been arrested and is now digging dirt." As Sahib Bahadur mentioned his beauty a few times, the prison warden remarked, "Sir, his handsomeness is no match for his sister, who is extremely gorgeous." Sahib Bahadur then longed to see her. That night, Sahib Bahadur sent for Ami Chand and said to him, "I will release you from your imprisonment, appoint you to a good post, and will reward you, on the condition that you bring your sister to me." Ami Chand agreed to this, and Sahib Bahadur removed the chains from his feet. He gave him one of his horses and a servant, and Ami Chand went off on horseback to his village.

The villagers were surprised to see Ami Chand, and they questioned him about his presence since there was still much time left on his sentence. He did not disclose the whole picture and instead made up a loose tale about his valor and suggested he was released on account of it. Ami Chand went to his house and reunited with his mother but did not find his sister there. After staying there two days, he told his mother that he really wanted to see his sister, so his mother told him to go to her husband's house if he wanted to meet her.

Accordingly, he went there and told his sister that their mother was very unwell and was, in fact, close to dying. His sister said that it was not up to her own discretion to go; therefore, Ami Chand asked

[15] Present-day Haryana.

[16] Closer to Gurgaon/Delhi.

[17] The digging occurred between 1817 and 1830.

his brother-in-law, who refused to send his wife with him. In secret, Ami Chand told his sister that she should seize upon this one last opportunity to see her mother's face. His sister told him to go to a certain well nearby and that she would come there with the excuse of filling some water and would then go along with him to see her ailing mother. When she got to the well, she left the pot she had carried with her there, and the two of them climbed onto the horse and took off, but he did not take her to their mother's house. Instead, he took her to the spot where Sahib Bahadur was encamped instead.

When Ami Chand's brother-in-law came back to his house from the fields, he did not find his wife there, so he became suspicious that perhaps Sarwan had gone with her brother. He went to his in-laws' place and found his mother-in-law in good health and asked her about his wife's whereabouts. She said that neither Sarwan nor Ami Chand were there. Therefore, he searched extensively and finally found out from someone that Farijan Sahib Bahadur had become desirous of Sarwan and Ami Chand had taken her to him. When he heard this, he lost his senses and decided to return to his village. Once there, he gathered a group of a few men and went to Sahib Bahadur's encampment. He found the situation there to be exactly as he had been told. He petitioned Sahib Bahadur saying, "When you, as the ruler, do something like this, then your subjects will be destroyed." Sahib Bahadur dismissed them, and so they returned to their village. After a short time Sarwan's husband found the opportunity and murdered Sahib Bahadur.

Version 2. Song

Faridan came from faraway Calcutta, worshipping the Five Saints,
Old Faridan on his cropped-tailed horse went about looking for Sarwan.
He went to five places in Delhi, and the sixth in Gunghana[18] village.
His tent was pitched by the white well, the pegs securely fastened.

[18] Spelled variously across the versions.

The messengers searched street by street for Sarwan, but she was not found.
Ami Chand was captured while grazing the cattle, his arms tied behind him.
"Free my arms, O Faridan, and I will tell you where Sarwan is."
"She went out of the main street to the millet field by the smaller lane."
Sarwan was caught cutting the millet with her sickle by her side.
Her stool was perched on her head, her spinning wheel under her arm with a thread hanging down.
Her cup in her hand and her comb in her cup, she ran to the barber's wife,
"Braid my tangled hair, he is here to take me away."
"O my sisters, come and see your friend, for we shall not meet again."
He caught her hand and grabbed her by the waist and put her in the elephant carriage.
Sitting upon the elephant, Sarwan's tears slowly streamed down her face.
"May the city of Gunghana always be settled, but may you not be settled, O Ami Chand!
From midnight till dawn, she stayed up counting the stars forlornly.
Sweets were distributed to the armies[19] in the name of the Five *Pirs*/Saints.
"Leave behind wearing your *lehenga*,[20] my Sarwan, and embrace a skirt instead."
"Leave behind carrying your wicker basket, my Sarwan, and start loving a hat instead."
"Leave behind wearing your bodice, my Sarwan, and start loving a petticoat instead."
"Leave behind sitting on a stool, my Sarwan, and start loving a chair instead."
"Tearfully leave behind wearing a hat and tie on a turban instead."

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[19] The word here could be read differently to say "the good people."
[20] Indian traditional skirt.

"Tearfully leave behind wearing trousers and wear a *dhoti*[21] instead."
"Tearfully leave behind wearing a coat and wear a quilt instead,"
"Tearfully leave behind wearing boots and start loving Indian shoes/ *jutti* instead."
"Leave behind your frivolous speech, Faridan, and use plain speech instead."

Version 3. From the Nawab of Loharu, Alauddin Ahmad Khan: The Song of Sarwan

Pharijan left from faraway Calcutta, worshipping the Five Saints/ *Pirs*.
He searched five places in Delhi, and the sixth he went to Gangana village.
He pitched his tent by the white well, the pegs securely fastened.
Min Chand was apprehended while smoking his hookah, his hands chained up.
"You have one thing, Min Chand, that no one else has."
"If it is mine, I will give it, Pharijan, but I cannot give what is not mine."
God knows, dear, he worshipped the Five Pirs.[22]
"Tell me the secret of where Sarwan is hidden, and I will reward you with an elephant."
The turncoat[23] revealed the secret; Sarwan was in the millet field.
Upon his white horse went brown Pharijan, trampling through the millet field.
He found Sarwan cutting the millet, with her sickle by her side.
He grabbed her hands and sat her on her horse, weeping bitterly.
She had cut five sheaves of millet but could not cut the sixth.

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[21] A large piece of unstitched fabric usually fashioned into pants.

[22] Repeating refrain; the original text does not place it after every stanza as Temple does in his translation. I, instead, include it wherever Chaina Mull, the *munshi*, included it in his transcript of the original.

[23] The Original "text" mentions that it was someone from within the house, i.e., Ami Chand, here Min Chand.

"I will make your father a *Chaudhri*,[24] your brother a *thanedar*."[25]
"Go see your aunts [and say goodbye], but Min Chand you will not see."
Min Chand, if you want to see her, see her now, you will not see her after this.
A cup in her hand, a comb in the cup, she went to the barber's house.
God knows, dear, he worshipped the Five Pirs.
"Braid my tangled hair, O barber's wife, for this will be the last time."
He took her hand and seated her on the elephant carriage, weeping like a deer.
From midnight till the break of dawn, she stayed up forlornly counting the stars.
"Leave behind sitting on a stool, Sarwan, learn to sit on a chair."
God knows, dear, he worshipped the Five Pirs.
"Give up your *lehenga*, Sarwan, and learn to wear a skirt."
Sarwan went off in the midst of the goldsmiths and bangle-makers.
"I will make you a gold ornament of five gold pieces for your forehead."[26]
"I will make you a nose-ring of eighty gold pieces glittering with jewels."
"I will make you a skirt of eighty yards to cover yourself."
"You have insulted my five brothers,[27] and they will never regain their honor again."
The older brother agreed to giving her up; the younger would not have done so.
Five villages were within their control, but Min Chand could not be controlled.
Sarwan escaped from the small lane to the main street.

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[24] Headman.

[25] A police officer.

[26] The term in the original is *Mohr*, or gold coin.

[27] It literally says "pulled off the turbans," which is idiomatic but also shows the importance of clothes and outfits to the conceptions of identity, which is also seen throughout the songs.

The messengers searched through all the streets, and the police
searched every house for her.
All the way from Calcutta came Pharijan, worshipping the Five
Saints,
God knows, dear, he worshipped the Five Pirs.

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