

MS: Shaikh Farid: Couplets in English translation

Shaikh Farid's couplets in English

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Contents

Introduction	pages 3-10
Slokas	pages 11-23
Bio-note on translator	page 24

Introduction

Shaikh Farid

Shaikh Farid Gunj-e-Shakar (1179 ?-1265?), or Baba Farid, as he is fondly remembered, was a Sufi saint famous and widely revered, a divine thoroughly read in the Quran and Islamic theory, a proselytizer, a faith healer doling out amulets, a house-holder with a large family. He, along with Moin-ud-Din Chishti (1141-1230), Bakhtyar Kaki, and Khawaja Nizam-ud-Din Auliya (1238 - 1325 CE) was one of the four great founders of the Chishti Sufi order in Indian sub-continent. And he is regarded as the sole author of Farid Bani, a text comprising 112 slokas and four shabads in Punjabi, incorporated into the Sikh Scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Since Farid Bani is the earliest single corpus of Punjabi poetry available to us, Farid is also regarded as the first Punjabi poet. It is said that nearly two and a half centuries after Farid's death, Guru Nanak (1469-1539) visited Farid's shrine at Jodhan (now in Pakistan) and met Shaikh Brahm (Ibrahim), or Farid Sani as he was known, the then Gaddi Nashin, successor, at the shrine and acquired this poetic collection, in what form it is difficult to say, and we do not know for certain how he preserved it. Farid Bani came to light only when Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606), the fifth Sikh Guru, made it part of the Sikh scripture in 1604.

Although by a wide consensus, at least among Indian Punjabi scholars, it is accepted that Farid Bani is the exclusive work of Shaikh Farid, a number of questions still remain unanswered about its authorship. At least three views have been in circulation, all without any definitely clinching evidence. First, that it is the work of Shaikh Brahm from whom Guru Nanak is said to have acquired it during one of his visits to Ajodhan. Second, that Shaikh Farid himself is the author of the entire work. Third, that it is the work of multiple authors, of Shaikh Farid himself and his successors. This uncertainty is further complicated by the fact that the only source of Farid Bani is the Guru Granth Sahib, and it came to light in 1604, more than three hundred years after Farid's death. And we have no evidence of the existence of any other poetic or prose text similar in language used in Farid Bani. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult to determine linguistically the period to which the text belongs, though it has been suggested that the language of Farid Bani is closer to 16th century Punjabi.

These questions arise because we have hardly any evidence, written or oral, of Farid Bani's existence during the time of Shaikh Farid himself. We do not know for certain, if it was in existence, how it was used during his lifetime. Was it preserved in oral form or was it committed to writing? Was it recited and sung, and by whom and on what occasions? And what happened to the text from the time of Farid's death and its 'discovery' by Guru Nanak, after a long period of more than two centuries. Did Shaikh Farid's successors preserve his compositions in their original form without any changes at all, or did they add or subtract any verses, or make any modifications? Did Guru Arjan Dev use the whole text acquired by Guru Nanak or did he leave out some part of it which did not fit into the framework of the Sikh scripture envisioned by him? These questions remain unanswered for want of any definite available evidence. But a few things are clear. The verses, most of them, have the stamp of the Shaikh's personality as revealed from the probably authentic biographical records. And,

why would Guru Arjan Dev make it part of the Sikh Scripture unless he was sure that it was the work of Farid himself? Thus in the absence of any definite records about the composition, use and subsequent transmission of Farid Bani through centuries before it was codified in the Sikh Scripture by Guru Arjan Dev, one may assume that, perhaps excepting some slokas, which seem out of tune with Farid's voice in the rest of the corpus, Farid is the original composer of Farid Bani. But, of course, the verses must have undergone certain changes over time and acquired their present form after having undergone lot of honing and refinement, with some additions and subtractions by his successors.

Biographical details

Shaikh Farid, or Farid-ud-Din Masud (the name given to him at his birth) was born in 1179 (1175/3?) at a village called Kothewal, 10 km from Multan in the Punjab region of what is now Pakistan, to Jamāl-ud-Dīn Suleimān and Maryam Bībī (Qarsum Bībī), daughter of Shaikh Wajīh-ud-Dīn Khojendī. Farid was the grandson of one Qadi Shu'aib who belonged to a noble family of Kabul that had to flee from Kabul and come to India and settle down in Kothewal. Farid's first teacher was his mother whose influence on him was lasting because she kindled the spark of divine love in him which dominated his whole being and molded his thoughts and actions. After his early education in Kothewal, Farid moved to Multan, which had become a centre for Islamic education. It was there that he met his teacher Qutab-ud-Din Bakhtyar Kaki (1173-1235), a noted Sufi saint, who was passing through Multan on his way from Baghdad to Delhi. After completion of his education in Multan, Farid may have travelled to Sistan and Kandahar and spent a long time there.

On return from his travels of many years, Farid moved to Delhi to be trained further in the Islamic doctrine under his master Qutab-ud-Din Bakhtyar Kaki. After completion of his training he settled in Hansi, a small town in the present Indian state of Haryana. Here he stayed for many years. It is said that sometime here he is said to have performed Chilla-e-Makus, an ascetic practice essential for a Chishti Sufi, by tying himself with a rope and hanging upside down in a well for 40 nights; though such a hazardous feat seems highly improbable. When Qutab-ud-Dīn Bakhtyār Kākī died in 1235, Farid left Hansi and came to Delhi and became his spiritual successor; but in the hustle and bustle of the capital he missed the peace and tranquility of Hansi. He became tired of life in Delhi, its noise and bustle and political intrigues and decided to go away. He had developed an attitude of complete indifference towards the rulers of the day and was in search of a place where he could carry on his devotions in a peaceful manner undisturbed by visitors. So he left Delhi and finally settled down in Ajodhan (the present Pakpattan, Pakistan) where he lived to the last day of his life. On his way to Ajodhan, while passing through Faridkot, he met the 20-year-old Nizam-ud-Din Auliya, who went on to become his disciple, and later his successor, Sufi Khalifa. at Ajodhan Farid set up his Jama Khana, or Khanqah, far from the city which over the years became a centre of learning and religious instruction where Farid instructed his disciples and preached to laymen. Farid wanted his disciples to accept a life of penury and penitence with pleasure and devote their life to God and God alone. His advice to his

disciples was that If they desired elevation in their spiritual rank, they must not mix with princes of the blood. This is how he advised, later when he had settled in Ajodhan, one of his disciples who was going to Delhi: ‘Do not associate with kings and nobles. Regard their visits to your house as calamities. Every durwesh who opens the door of associations with kings and nobles is doomed.’

Ajodhan became famous as Pak-Pattan, close to the river Sutlej, the holy jetty from where boatmen ferry people from one bank of a river to the other. Symbolically the place became one from where people were ferried from the worldly existence to the otherworldly one. The modest Jama Khana was maintained from donations and Farid saved nothing for the next day and whatever was received was spent or distributed among the needy. To keep something for the next day meant one had no faith in the Almighty. Life at Ajodhan was a hard one. He lived a life of poverty and distress. Especially the last years of his life were extremely difficult. But all this could not disturb the inner peace of his mind. He had become famous and scholars and divines from all parts of the world came to meet him. He lived in a modest house made of unbaked mud bricks with his large family of perhaps three wives and a number of children. Very often the family had to starve. He wore tattered clothes both out of poverty and inclination. If someone presented him with a new dress, he gave it to some needy one. For his bedding he had only one blanket and ordinary loosely knit cot. He fasted constantly. He spent the day in prayers and attending to visitors.

Farid died of a ripe old age in 1265 (?).

Farid Bani

Farid Bani in the Guru Granth Sahib consists of 130 slokas (apart from the four shabads, or hymns) out of which 112 are ascribed to Farid and the remaining 18 slokas are the work of different Sikh gurus, which punctuate the Farid Bani as gentle comments or disagreements with what is said in Farid’s slokas preceding each one of them. I have translated only the 112 slokas ascribed to Farid.

The 112 slokas ascribed to Farid are a heterogeneous collection of couplets composed by him from time to time most probably during the last 25 years of his life which he spent at Ajodhan. Each sloka stands alone, almost always disconnected with slokas preceding or following it with a few exceptions, complete in itself, aphoristic, intensely musical, very often a juxtaposition of contrasted images. Taken together they become a unique meditation on the transience of earthly life:

*Look, Farid, the change: your beard has turned grey;
the future draws near, the past has slid away.*

*Farid, how far the sprint on house-top; wake up;
the few days allotted are running away at a gallop.*

*Birds that had once inhabited the lake are gone;
Farid, the brimful lake too would go, leaving the withered lotuses alone.*

its decay and extinction:

*Farid, I have seen the eyes that once the world bewitched;
dreading the touch of kajal, birds there their brood have nixed.*

*Shaikh Farid has grown old, his limbs begin to tremble;
he may live a hundred, yet his body into dust would crumble.*

the vanity of power and possessions:

*Once under canopies, with drums, by bards praised sky-high;
are now asleep in graveyards, buried like orphans they lie.*

*Farid, builders of mansions, domes, lofty towers, too are gone;
having bargained for dirt, to their graves they have moved on.*

all of which leads him to the edge of despair:

*Farid, the lowly grave calls: come home, you homeless;
in the end you have to come to me, of death be fearless.*

This dark vision of life is communicated in images of decay, death and desolation – gray hair, skeletal bodies without strength to move, defunct senses, desolate towns, empty palaces and mansions, dried- up ponds, departed Shaikhs, potentates and beauties, all resting in their graves till eternity, their bodies prey to worms, and the hollows of their eyes the nesting places for birds. The eternal life in the grave is forcefully and repeatedly contrasted with the momentariness of life presented as the eight pahars of the day, or a handful of sesame seeds, or water in an earthen pot. Fear, pain and death are presented in the images of the angel of death and his sudden descent, the swoop of an eagle, rivers in spate, the cracking of bones, the breaking open of doors, the crushing of cotton and sesame seeds and sugarcane stalks in a press, the beating of the gong, the chopping and burning of heads.

Earthly existence is an existence without hope unless devoted to the love of God.

*Farid, in youth she didn't please her lord; grew old and died;
in her grave she cries: with you, lord, I failed to abide!*

*Farid, for mansions, domes, and lofty palaces do not lust;
of no avail would these be once under a heap of dust.*

*Farid, don't latch on to palaces, riches; remember cruel death;
think of the place where you must go after your last breath.*

For Farid there is no forgiveness for a life of guilt and earthly pleasures:

*Farid, haven't you gone and seen the gong hung at the gate?
If the innocent are so struck, imagine the fate we the guilty await!*

*Farid, look at the fate of sesame seeds, cotton bolls,
sugar cane stalks, paper, clay pots, coals:
for those who do evil deeds, such punishment unrolls.*

*Farid, death seems like a river bank washed away;
we've heard of hellfire ahead, and wails of dismay;
some have understood this, some are still far away;
one's deeds alone in this world would hereafter pay.*

This is in complete contrast to the vision of another Sufi poet, Rumi (1207-1273), Farid's contemporary though living far away from him in what is now Turkey.

*Come back, come back, whatever you are, come back;
If you have broken your vows a hundred times, come back!
Since God's mercy is for the sake of sinners,
Whether, infidel, drunk or idolater – come back.*

What is the explanation for such a terrifying vision of life? Commentators on Farid have certainly written about this 'pessimistic' and 'nihilistic' vision. Farid's asceticism, his rejection of worldliness and willing acceptance of pain are no doubt grounded in the Sufi asceticism of the 8th century Islamic world view but this alone is not sufficient to explain the burning intensity of his pain. Farid's own very long and hard old age also is not sufficient for one cannot expect a saint to complain of his personal pain especially when he had himself chosen a life of asceticism. But perhaps when these two are combined with the pain and suffering of thousands of ordinary men and women with whom he was in touch and sympathy, we come to the main springs of Farid's devastating indictment of the earthly existence. For almost a century Farid had been a witness to the upheavals in North-western India, Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia. He also carried the memories of uprooting of thousands of men like his own grandfather. It was an epoch in which the Ghaznavids, the Ghurids and the Mongols had trampled over plains and mountains, spreading death and desolation wherever they went. This became the dominant experience of the ordinary people. Farid could align his own pain with theirs.

Farid, I thought I alone suffered; but it's the whole world;

from the roof-top I saw the same fire consume every household.

It is perhaps this internalization in his own life, and its expression in his poetry, the pain of a whole epoch that may explain Farid's terrifying vision of earthly life. Farid seems to hark back to what he imagined was the pristine purity of Islam revealed to the Prophet and practiced by him and the first four Khalifas, but abandoned by their successors in their hankering after worldly power, wealth and grandeur. His unrelenting denunciation of the earthly existence could arise only out of such disillusionment. This naturally led him to seek comfort in the transcendent God, present only through His absence in things mortal, and

experienced, not as pure joy, but as pure pain. In Farid's poetry the gulf between this world and beyond is bridged by faith on the brink of despair.

*Farid, cares my cot, pain the strings, separation my mattress;
such has been my life, my true Lord, come and witness.*

*Farid, my body has become a skeleton, crows peck at my heels;
and still God does not come: see what my destiny deals!*

*Farid, brick under head, body on the ground, worms gnawing;
how many yugas would pass in this posture lying?*

God for Farid is the sweetest thing:

*Farid, coarse sugar, crystal sugar, jaggery, honey, buffalo milk:
all are sweet, but in sweetness aren't of God's ilk.*

but Farid never goes ecstatic about God like many other Sufi poets. It is the pain of separation that defines his relationship with God.

Translations of Farid Bani in English

Farid has been translated into English by many scholars, as part of the Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, and also separately. The earliest English translation of the holy Granth was by Ernest Trump in 1877; the next by Max Arthur Macauliffe's in 1909; Gopal Singh's in 1960; another by Man Mohan Singh was published between 1962-69; G. S. Talib's in 1977, Pritam Singh Chahal's in 1993; Kartar Singh Duggal's in 2006; Khalsa Consensus translation by Dr Sant Singh Khalsa in 2007. These are all translations of the Granth Sahib, and Farid gets translated as a matter of course. There are a number of translations of Farid alone. There is also one translation by a Pakistani scholar Maqbool Elahi in 1967. I don't know if there are any other translations of Farid done by a Pakistani scholar.

Trump's pioneering translation has all the crudeness of a proto-translation, and is full of blatant inaccuracies and misrepresentations. Macauliffe translates with 'necessary solemnity of form', in the 'current language' of the day without any effort to produce any 'startling expressions'. He admits the difficulty of translating the Punjabi expressions into Anglo-Saxon words. He avoids archaisms because they contribute to an ornateness of style. Even then his translation has many inaccuracies and misinterpretations. He does use archaisms, and often indulges in needless phrasal flabbiness. But by and large he preserves the integrity of Farid's imagery. He makes half-hearted efforts to retain the Sloka form of Farid's verse and its rhythm, but without great success. The subsequent Indian translations of Farid, whether as part of the holy Granth, or independently, further correct the mistakes of interpretation. The translations, especially where Farid has been translated as part of the holy Granth, attempt to preserve the Guru's 'word' as faithfully as possible and with utmost reverence and devotion. Among all these the translations of Farid that use verse do so only half-heartedly; the

translators being satisfied if they have conveyed the ‘meaning’ to their best ability. Their priority is to convey the meaning as clearly as possible but not reproduce the poetic structure and the imagery, which is always a tall order.

In my translations I have attempted to imitate the structure of the verse by conforming to the sloka form, using the rhyme scheme of the rhyming couplet. I have tried to retain the integrity of Farid’s imagery and metaphor, allowing the images to speak for themselves and the reader to make his own meaning. I have also tried to maintain the great economy of words and concentration of meaning, which are the hallmark of these Slokas by avoiding the verbal flabbiness found in a number of translations I have studied and used to understand Farid. One should remember that most of the lines in the slokas consists of six to nine words, only a few consisting of ten words. In my translations I have tried to limit the words in each line as far as possible, not going beyond 12. It may seem questionable to talk of a line in verse in terms of the number of words it contains rather than in terms of its prosodic structure, its rhyme and sound system. This oddity arises because of the difficulty, the near impossibility, of transposing the prosodic structure of the sloka (doha/dohra) into a similar or nearest prosodic structure in English, which happens to be the heroic couplet, a pair of rhyming iambic pentameter lines. In English the prosodic structure is described in terms of combinations of a certain number of accented and unaccented syllables and the heroic couplet has a very rigid structure of ten syllables, alternatively stressed. On the other hand, the prosodic structure of a sloka in Punjabi (doha, in Hindi) is described in terms of characters called matras, which are a combination of consonants (vinyanajana) and vowels (swara). A perfect sloka (doha) consists of a pair of rhyming lines each of 24 matras. Each line has a break after 13 matras followed by 11 matras. However, the ideal or the perfect sloka (or doha) is uncommon. In Farid Bani perfect slokas are very few, and vast majority of the slokas overstep the limit of 24 and the division within a line also does not conform to the 13-11 pattern. This is not a defect because it is the content that defines the form here, and the ideal sloka structure is at most a reference point and nothing more. Keeping all this in mind one can see that it is not possible to transpose the structure of the sloka into that of the heroic couplet because the impossibility of converting a matra structure into a syllable structure. The result is that each line in the translated sloka varies in syllabic length which is determined by the content of the original sloka. However, the basic features of the sloka – the break within a line that divides it into two balancing, mostly contrasting images, the contrast and balance between the first and the second line of the sloka, the second line clinching and closing what is kept suspended in the first line, and the end rhyme are achieved to a great extent. Attempt has also been made to conform to the utmost brevity and condensation which is the hallmark of a Farid couplet. The overall result is the reworking of the heroic couplet to suit the content of a Farid sloka. The result is a couplet which resembles the heroic couplet outwardly but not in its intrinsic prosodic structure. Of course, other problems remain. I had to perforce make certain compromises that might seem untenable, but I hope they are not unworthy.

I hope this translation achieves some of the intensity of the original Farid to convey his intense awareness of death, the transience of life, the existentialist pain of living, and the

vanity of worldly ambition, in a language shorn of superfluities, and using sharply realized images from day-to-day life.

Slokas

1

Preordained is the day the bride must go;
Malku, only heard of, his face shall show;
 extract the breath, cracking the bones with one blow;
 nothing avails against what's written, you must know.
 Bridegroom death, breath, the bride shall hold and go;
 sending her off, with whom the body share its woe?
 Hairy thin's the bridge *Salaat*, don't you know?
 Farid, beware, listen to voices, don't let yourself go.

2

Farid, dervish's way's hard, worldly path I tread;
 this bundle on my head, how should I shed?

3

Unfathomable is this world, a hidden fire;
 my Lord's done well, or I too would burn in its ire.

4

Farid, had I known sesame were few, I would have been careful;
 had I known my love was artless, I would have been less boastful.

5

Had I known the knot would unfasten, tightly I would have bound;
 I have wandered everywhere, none like you I have found.

6

Farid, if you be wise, don't paint others black;
 lower your head, look within to see what you lack.

7

Farid, if they hit you, don't hit back with heat;
 just go home quietly, kissing their feet.

8

Farid, at the time to earn, you in worldly pleasures tarried;
 Death's foundation is laid, when done you'll be carried.

9

Look, Farid, the change: your beard has turned grey;
 the future draws near, the past has slid away.

10

Look, Farid, the change; sugar has turned my bane;
 with whom except the Lord should I share my pain?

11

Farid, eyes of seeing, ears of hearing are tired;
 the bough has withered, its colours expired.

12

Farid, who lack devotion in youth, seldom show it when old;
 fall in love with your Lord, and be cast in a new mould.

13

Farid, I have seen the eyes that once the world bewitched;
 dreading the touch of kajal, birds there their brood have nixed.

14

Farid, I have shouted, screamed, counselled each day;
 under Satan's sway, how would he change his way?

15

Farid, grass of the footpath become,
 if to the Lord you long to come;
 plucked by one, trampled upon by all,
 you will then be admitted to His hall.

16

O Farid, don't denigrate dust, nothing is as high;
 under your feet when alive, on top when you die.

17

Farid, in greed there's no love; greed is love's bane;
how long can one stay under a leaky thatch in rain?

18

Farid, why tramp jungle to jungle, on thorns tread;
God lives in the heart, why to the jungles head?

19

Farid, on these tiny legs I crossed plains, mountains all the way;
today, Farid, this water pot seems a hundred kos away.

20

Farid, the nights are long, my sides ache and burn;
cursed be their lives who for someone else do yearn.

21

Farid, if my possessions from my friends I ever keep;
my heart should burn on embers red like madder deep.

22

Farid, the jaat plants *kikar*, hoping *Bijauri* grapes to grow on;
wears himself out spinning wool, hoping silk to put on.

23

Farid, the street is muddy, my love's abode far away;
if I go, my blanket wets; if I stay back, the bond gives way.

24

Let the blanket drench, let Allah send down rains;
I must go meet my love, so the bond remains.

25

Farid, anxious only lest the turban should sully in dust;
this heedless heart doesn't see, the head too lie there must.

26

Farid, coarse sugar, crystal sugar, jaggery, honey, buffalo milk:
all are sweet, but in sweetness aren't of God's ilk.

27

Farid, wood is my bread, and hunger my curry;
they who eat ghee-coated bread have lot to worry.

28

Eat your plain dry bread and cool water drink;
Farid, don't of others' ghee-coated bread ever think.

29

Tonight, without my husband, my limbs twisted and bent;
go, ask the widow, how her nights are spent.

30

Neither at her in-laws', nor at her parents' she can abide;
her husband doesn't care, yet she's called a blessed bride.

31

She bathed, perfumed and decked herself, then slept on;
Farid, the asafoetida smell took over, the fragrance of musk was gone.

32

Passing of youth I do not dread, if my love abide;
Farid, starved of love, many a youth has withered and dried.

33

Farid, cares my cot, pain the strings, separation my mattress;
such has been my life, my true Lord, come and witness.

34

Welcome the pain of separation, sovereign is this pain;
Farid, like a corpse is the body that does not bear this pain.

35

Farid, these poisonous stalks have sugar coating on them;
some wasted their lives planting, others harvesting them.

36

Farid, days in wild pursuits, nights in sleep you passed.
Wherefore did you come here? By Him you'll be asked.

37

Farid, haven't you gone and seen the gong at the gate?
If the innocent are so struck, imagine what we the guilty await!

38

Every hour it's struck, punished again and again;
this body is like the gong, passing the nights in pain.

39

Shaikh Farid has grown old; his limbs begin to tremble;
he may live a hundred, yet his body into dust would crumble.

40

Farid, don't reduce me, my Lord, to wait at others' doorway;
If You would keep me alive like this, take my life away.

41

Axe on shoulder, pitcher on head, blacksmith, to the forest you head;
Farid, I seek my Lord here, you the fiery coal instead.

42

Farid, some have surfeit of corn, others not even salt;
hereafter it'll be known who will get welted for this default.

43

Once under canopies, with drums, by bards praised sky-high;
now sleep in graveyards, buried like orphans they lie.

44

Farid, builders of mansions, domes, lofty towers, too are gone;
having bargained for dirt, to their graves they have moved on.

45

Farid, a quilt can be patched, but life-breath not once;
Shaikhs and their disciples, all are gone, on their turns.

46

Farid, Malku forced his way while two lamps were alight;
 captured the fort, robbed the treasury, snuffed out the light.

47

Farid, look at the fate of sesame seeds, cotton bolls,
 sugar cane stalks, paper, clay pots, coals:
 for those who do evil deeds, such punishment unrolls.

48

Farid, mat on shoulder, Sufi's robe, sugary tongue, scissors inside;
 brightness of day outside, darkness of night inside.

49

Farid, not a drop would flow if the body is dissected.
 There's no blood in the body with God's name saturated.

50

Farid, look for a pool where things are clear;
 why go for turbid waters, and mud on your hands smear.

51

Farid, in youth she didn't please her lord; grew old and died;
 in her grave she cries: with you, lord, I failed to abide!

52

Farid, the head, the beard, the moustache – all have turned grey;
 O foolish and heedless heart, why revelries still mark your day!

53

Farid, how far the sprint on house-top; wake up;
 the few days allotted are running away at a gallop.

54

Farid, for mansions, domes, and lofty palaces do not lust;
 Of no avail would these be once under a heap of dust.

55

Farid, don't latch on to palaces, riches; remember cruel death;
think of the place where you must go after your last breath.

56

Farid, think not of deeds that of merit fall short;
lest you should shame yourself in His court.

57

Farid, serve the Lord, setting your mind free;
a dervish needs the steadfastness of a tree.

58

Farid, black is my attire, in black I am disguised;
burdened with sin I roam, a dervish I'm characterized.

59

Once blighted it will not bloom, if dipped again in water;
Farid, once divorced from God, she keeps lamenting ever after.

60

When a virgin she yearned, once married troubles reign;
Farid, she now repents, she can't be a virgin again.

61

To a brackish pond swans come and alight;
Dip in their beaks, but don't drink; they long to take flight.

62

Swans land in a kodhra field, people rush to drive them off;
the artless don't know, for swans the coarse grain is a turn-off.

63

Birds that had once inhabited the lake are gone;
Farid, the brimful lake too would go, leaving the withered lotuses alone.

64

Farid, brick under head, body on the ground, worms gnawing;
how many yugas would pass in this posture lying?

65

Farid, the beautiful pitcher broke, the splendid rope gave way;
at whose door is the messenger of death a guest today?

66

Farid, the beautiful pitcher broke, the splendid rope gave way;
they, who are a burden on earth, won't show up today!

67

Farid, you un-praying dog, this is not the right way;
you never come to the mosque, five times to pray.

68

Wake up, Farid, perform the ablutions, the morning namaz say;
the head that does not bow before God, cut it right away.

69

What to do with the head that does not before God submit?
Place it under the cooking pot as firewood and burn it.

70

Farid, where are thy parents who gave birth to thee?
They are gone leaving you here, and still you don't see.

71

Farid, level your heart, smoothing the humps and hollows;
you won't pass through hell-fire in what hereafter follows.

72

Farid, had they slit my throat when they cut the cord that day;
these ordeals and afflictions wouldn't have come my way.

73

The teeth, the legs, the eyes, the ears – all have run down;
the body cries out: my close friends have let me down.

74

Farid, do good for evil, let not your heart in anger turn;
Your body contract no ills, you would earn all you yearn.

75

Farid, birds are guests, the world a garden of delight;
morning drums are sounding: be ready for the flight.

76

Farid, musk is apportioned at night, those asleep get no share;
how can the sleepy-eyed hope to receive such fare?

77

Farid, I thought I alone suffered; but it's the whole world;
from the roof-top I saw the same fire consume every household.

78

Don't run over your banks, you too would be arraigned;
follow only the course by God ordained.

79

Farid, the day is spent in pain, the night's my thorny lot;
the boatman cries out: the boat in the whirlpool is caught.

80

The river flows on and on, its banks breaking through;
if the boatman be watchful, what harm can the whirlpool do!

81

Farid, in name I have twenty friends; searching I find none;
I smoulder like dried dung, longing to meet the loving one.

82

Farid, this body barks daylong; why suffer day after day?
Shall plug my ears, let the wind blow as it may.

83

Farid, God's like ripened dates, a honey-sweet river;
each day that passes is forfeited by time forever.

84

Farid, my body has become a skeleton, crows peck at my heels;
still God does not come: see what my destiny deals!

85

O crow, you have striped this skeleton of all its meat;
 don't touch these two eyes hoping their beloved to greet.

86

O crow, fly away, don't peck at this skeleton;
 don't eat away the flesh, my love resides herein.

87

Farid, the lowly grave calls: come home, you homeless;
 hereafter you have to come here, of death be fearless.

88

With these very eyes I have seen so many depart;
 Farid, people worry about themselves; I too on my part.

89

Cleanse yourself, and you'll see Me, then contented you would be;
 Farid, abide with Me, and the whole world yours would be.

90

How long can a tree on a river bank stay?
 Farid, how long can you retain water in a pot of clay?

91

Farid, palaces have emptied; under the ground they now lie;
 the lowly graves the departed souls now occupy;
 O Shaikh, you too will go, sooner or later; say goodbye.

92

Farid, death seems like a river bank washed away;
 we've heard of hellfire ahead, and wails of dismay;
 some have understood this, some are still far away;
 one's deeds alone in this world would hereafter pay.

93

Farid, at the river bank the crane's lost in frolic and fun;
 a hawk swoops down upon the disporting crane, of a sudden.
 When God's hawks swoop down, all sport is undone;
 God does things that are foreseen by none.

94

This three and half maund body sustains itself on water and grains;
 Man, on coming into this world, many hopes entertains.
 Death's messenger comes breaking every door;
 his three loving brothers then bind him secure;
 look, the man goes carried upon shoulders four;
 Farid, good deeds in this world would help at God's door.

95

Farid, I bless the birds that in the wilderness reside,
 they pick at gravel, nest in the ground, and in God abide.

96

Farid, the season changes, the trees shake, the leaves fall;
 have searched the four corners, there's no resting place at all.

97

Farid, tear this silken robe, wrap yourself in a woollen sheet;
 don the attire that would help you your beloved to meet.

98

Farid, they who forget Him, have faces stricken with dread;
 great sorrows here, no rest and home ahead.

99

Farid, one not awake before daybreak, though alive, is dead;
 you may forget God, but He always remembers you instead.

100

Time before midnight the blossom, time before daybreak brings fruit;
 they alone who keep night-long vigil, from God receive this fruit.

101

Still in search of a husband, there's in you something amiss;
one who's already wedded doesn't look elsewhere like this.

102

If patience is your bow, patience your bowstring;
patience your arrow, God won't let you miss anything.

103

With patience the stoics their bodies subdue;
they live close to God; to none they give any clue.

104

If forbearance as the way in your mind you firmly set,
you'd expand into a river, not break off as a rivulet.

105

Farid, to be a dervish is hard, you only play;
few have been able to walk the dervish's way.

106

My body burns like an oven, my bones like firewood;
If my feet tire, on my head I go to meet my beloved.

107

There's only one bird in the lake, but hunters so many;
this body's caught in waves; You are my hope, if any.

108

What's the word, what the virtue, what the chant;
and what the attire that would my lord enchant?

109

Humility the word, forgiveness the virtue, sweet tongue the chant;
these three, sister, if you wear, you'll surely your lord enchant.

110

Wise yet childlike; strong yet tender-hearted he should be;
sharing what little he has: only such a one can a devotee be.

111

Speak not one harsh word, the True One lives in all;
don't break any heart, priceless jewels are all.

112

All hearts are pearls; it is wrong to hurt anyone;
don't break any heart if you seek your loved one.

Bio-note on the translator

Born in 1937 I am a graduate from Panjab University (1956), postgraduate in English from Punjabi University (1970) and M.Litt in Comparative Indian Literature from Delhi University (1978). Served with the Government of India from 1958 to 1970 in a job that took me to different parts of the country including Ladakh where I served for more than two years travelling extensively along the Indo-Tibetan border. Resigned from Government service in 1970 and took up teaching English at Rao Tula Ram College (University of Delhi) (Now closed) for two years. After my services were terminated there I joined Deshbandhu Evening College, (now Ramanujan College) (University of Delhi) in 1972 where I taught English language to pass course students and English literature to English honours students and retired as Associate professor in 2002. Have published fiction, poetry, translated Punjabi poetry and Premchand's short stories into English, produced English language teaching course books for schools.

Works

My long study of R.K. Narayan's novels, *Pattern and Significance in the Novels of R.k.Narayan* was published in **Indian Literature**, Sahitya Akademi in 1975.

My M.Litt. dissertation (1978) was on *The Partition Theme in Hindi and Indo-Anglian Fiction (1978)*, a study of six Hindi and English novels including Yash Pal's *Joota Sach*, Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*, Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*. **(Unpublished)**

Published two short novels, *The Stricken Moth* (1984) and *Alone in the Wilderness* (2000), both from Writers' Workshop, Kolkata.

Published a few poems in *The Journal of the Poetry Society (India) and Poetry India: Voices for the Future (1993)* and done poetry reviews for the poetry society journal between 1991-94.

Translated Punjabi poet, **Puran Singh Kanwar (1942-96)**, into English (*A Season of Nights*, National Bookshop, Delhi, 2006).

Translated about 100 poems of Punjabi revolutionary poet **Pash (Avtar Singh Sandhu 1950-88)**, one of the most dominant, influential and discussed modern Punjabi poets. The translation titled '*Pash: A Poet of Impossible Dreams*' has been published by **Pash Memorial International Trust** together with **Shilalekh**, Delhi 2010.

Translated another Punjabi revolutionary-dalit poet, **Lal Singh Dil (1943-2007)**. A collection of about 100 poems, titled '*Exclusion Deprivation Nothingness: Selected Poems of Lal Singh Dil*' has been published by LG Publishers Distributors Delhi, 2017. Five of Dil's poems translated by me were published in the *Transitions* issue of the magazine *Modern Poetry in Translation (MPT) 2012*, published from Oxford, UK. Two of Dil's poems translated by me for MPT were published in their fiftieth anniversary collection of translated poetry *Centres of Cataclysm* (2016), published by Bloodaxe Books.

Have translated 28 short stories of Hindi writer Premchand, all of which are available on my blog <http://ghai-tc.blogspot.com/> . These stories have been published in book form under the title: *Premchand : God's Share in Stale Rice and Other Stories (2019)* by LG Publishers Distributors Delhi, 2019.

My book of translations of another Punjabi Dalit poet Balbir Madhopuri is in press.

I have also published the following articles on English language teaching:

'Learning a Foreign Language: Gulliver's Way' in 'FORTELL' (Journal of Teaching English Language and Literature), published by Forum of Teachers of English Language and Literature, New Delhi, January 2012.

'Reflections on having been a Learner before becoming a Teacher of English' in 'Language and Language Teaching' (Azimji Premji University), Volume 4 Number 4 Issue 7, January 2015

Translating Punjabi Poetry: An Approach, in 'Language and Language Teaching' (Azimji Premji University), Volume 6 Number 2 Issue 12, July 2017

One of my short stories '*She's Black*' has been published in the collection titled '*Glass Walls: Stories of Tolerance and Intolerance from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia*' published by Orient BlackSwan in 2019.

In addition, I have done extensive work on production and publication of course book series for English language teaching in schools.

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