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A munshi discussion on religion, and the *Simla Akhbār*, circa 1850

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Abstract

As a case study of the changing mentalities that emerged in colonial India, this article analyses a discussion that took place among several munshis (secretaries trained in Persian to run the affairs of princely states), and also provides a translation and edition of the text. The subject was a short polemical letter refuting the immortality of the soul, published around 1850 in the *Simla Akhbār* (*Simla News*). The main question entertained in this correspondence was not the merit of the sceptical argument, based in part on modern medical findings, but the potential public impact of dismissing a religious doctrine that sustains morality. Two of the participants in this conversation, Shivaprasad and Sital Singh, displayed the full range of changes that made the nineteenth century so extraordinary, and the way they responded illustrates some of the salient features and stages of this process, including the difficulty of foreseeing the elimination of much of the system for which munshis were trained.

Keywords: Print culture; munshis; religion in South Asia; religion and colonialism; vernacular newspapers in India; Sufi literature

The far-reaching and consequential transformations of cultural and religious identities in modern India, and their connections to communication media, are the subject of a considerable amount of contemporary scholarship on South Asia.¹ While it is always tempting to employ sweeping generalisations about the role of British colonialism in this process, it can be useful to scrutinise a focused, individual example, as a small canvas on which major themes may be more clearly discerned. Such is the case with the document presented here: a discussion that took place among several munshis (secretaries trained in Persian to run the affairs of states, large and small, on the model of the Mughal empire).² The subject under discussion was a short polemical letter questioning the immortality of the soul, submitted to the editor and published in one of the earliest vernacular newspapers published in India, the *Simla Akhbār* (*Simla News*), in around 1850. The main question on which the munshis' discussion focused was not the merit of the sceptical argument,

¹ Early discussions of these issues include Francis Robinson, 'Technology and religious change: Islam and the impact of print', *Modern Asian Studies* 27 (1993), pp. 229–251; Francis Robinson, 'Islamic reform and modernities in South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies* 42 (2008), pp. 259–281. Without attempting to list all the literature on this subject, one can point to the writings of Vasudha Dalmia, Francesca Orsini, David Lelyveld, Margrit Pernau, and Avril Powell, among others.

² Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The making of a munshi', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24 (2004), pp. 61–72.

based in part on modern medical findings, but whether to respond to the letter, given the potential impact of undermining a religious doctrine that sustains morality. In the course of this conversation, it may be observed that the two main participants—Shivaprasad and Sital Singh—illustrate between them, in very different ways, many of the changes that made the nineteenth century so extraordinary, including the difficulty of foreseeing the elimination of much of the system for which munshis were trained.

A local vernacular newspaper and a controversial letter

What exactly was the *Simla Akhbār*? Accounts differ in their descriptions of the linguistic medium of the newspaper, variously described as Hindi, Urdu, or Persian; according to Garcin de Tassy, it was printed in the Devanagari script.³ At a time when the politics of language in India was in considerable flux, it is not surprising to find such shifting characterisations. Evidently, the targeted subscribers were mostly aristocratic Hindus and a few Europeans. The paper was managed by Sayyid Abdullah ‘Shabnam’, and it began bimonthly publication in 1848 in the hill station of Simla, the summer administrative capital of colonial India. The number of issues published is uncertain, since hardly any copies survive.⁴ Reports indicate that the paper continued to be published until 1852, with a gap of several months in 1850. Its circulation was quite limited (in 1851, there were just 98 subscribers, of whom 46 were Hindus, 3 Muslims, 33 Christians, and the remainder institutions).⁵ But as one of the first native newspapers in British India, the *Simla News* enjoyed some prestige, receiving patronage from the British Resident in Simla, William Edwards, who had subscriptions set up for leading colonial officials.

By 1849 the newspaper was losing money, and the proprietor was forced to sell it. The new owner was Shivaprasad (1823–1895), trained as a munshi and successively employed by a series of Indian aristocrats (including the Raja of Benares) and highly placed colonial officials, notably Sir Henry Elliott. Sayyid Abdullah was hired back to help run the paper, which now proceeded under the editorial direction of Shivaprasad.

Regarding the content of the newspaper, only a few contemporary remarks about it can be found, but surviving references indicate that it published articles of scientific and historical import, especially translations from English; it was described by a contemporary publication as being ‘of the Useful Knowledge order’.⁶ Examples include translations of an article on a medieval copper plate inscription in 1848, of H. H. Wilson’s introduction to a translation of the Rig Veda, and of an archaeological article in 1849 by Alexander Cunningham, director of the Archaeological Survey of India.⁷ The *Simla News*, and the later career of Shivaprasad, may be considered examples of the transmission of British scholarship into the modern languages of India, with an emphasis on history and the related fields of geography and archaeology.⁸ Shivaprasad would become a

³ Garcin de Tassy, *La langue et la littérature hindoustaniennes de 1850 à 1869: discours d’ouverture du cours d’hindoustani*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1874), p. 88, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3466989> (accessed 20 June 2023). Although in Urdu the name of the town is spelled Shimla, the English form ‘Simla’ is retained here for simplicity.

⁴ The only copy I have traced is the issue of 15 April 1848, in the Archives of the Royal Asiatic Society (GB 891 HME/6/2).

⁵ A. Shakespear et al., ‘On the native press in the North-Western Provinces’, in *Selections from the Records of Government, North Western Provinces*, vol. 4 (Allahabad, 1868), pp. 16, 57, 83.

⁶ L. M. (ed.), ‘The native press in the N.W.P.’, *Ledlie’s Miscellany and Journal for the North West* 1 (September 1852), p. 208.

⁷ *Ibid.*; de Tassy, *La langue et la littérature hindoustaniennes de 1850 à 1869*, p. 227; Alexander Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India: Reports 1862–1884*, vol. 5 (Calcutta, 1875), p. 180.

⁸ Blain Auer, ‘Early modern Persian, Urdu, and English historiography and the imagination of Islamic India under British rule’, *Études de lettres* 2–3 (2014), doi.org/10.4000/edl.710; Jeffrey M. Diamond, ‘“Calculated to be

passionate spokesperson for this project and an admirer of the British officials who directed it (Cunningham calls Shivaprasad 'my friend'). Moreover, Shivaprasad would become one of the major advocates of the use of Hindi against Urdu by the late 1860s, and he seems to have fully subscribed to Sir Henry Elliott's hostile depiction of the 'Muhammadan' period of Indian history, together with its thinly veiled use of that critique to justify the benefits of British colonial rule.⁹

Shivaprasad's later ideological position is not yet apparent in the text under consideration, which seems to belong to an earlier phase in the development of identity politics and the internalisation of colonial epistemology. His remarks form part of a compilation put together by a little-known munshi, Ganga Bishan Kawl (known by the pen name 'Fikrat'), which is to be found in a small manuscript anthology in the British Library.¹⁰ This short text, entitled 'The Spirit Explained', consists of the following sections: (1) a preface by Fikrat, describing a letter to the editor of the *Simla News*, questioning the immortality of the soul, and the discussion that followed, which he decided to preserve in this document; (2) a cover letter from Shivaprasad to Fikrat, dated 2 June (1850?), requesting his assistance in conveying the article to Sital Singh; (3) the text of the article; (4) Sital Singh's response; and (5) a closing epigraph supplied in the margin by Fikrat. All of these sections are in Persian, with the exception of the letter itself (see section 3 below), which is in Hindustani in the Persian script. There is no indication which script the original letter employed, and it draws upon a vocabulary that includes both Sanskritic and Perso-Arabic words. If the letter was printed in Devanagari, it would be interesting to see whether it differed from the text in the manuscript version. The munshis (presumably all Hindus) deployed Islamic formulas in Arabic with their customary aplomb. A few marginal terms and comments in Hindi and Sanskrit are written in unconnected Devanagari characters, although a couple of letters are in the Nandinagari style. A complete translation and a diplomatic edition of the original texts follows at the end of these remarks.

Sital Singh, a cosmopolitan munshi

Although the seeds of Shivaprasad's later development had already been planted, in 1850 he was still imbued with some of the cosmopolitan spirit of the munshi trained in the Persianate literary tradition. Having grown up in the shade of the Benares royal court, Shivaprasad still had the greatest reverence for one of the most eminent munshis, Sital Singh (1776–1854), who was renowned for his mastery of calligraphy, poetry, and philosophy, and had trained the most prominent munshis of the next generation.¹¹ Sital Singh's erudite literary production, using the pen-name 'Bikhwud', included a collection of Persian poems, mystical aphorisms, and commentaries on Sufi writings as well as the Arabic verses of Ibn Arabi in his influential Sufi treatise, *Fusūs al-hikam*. When asked by British judge John Deane to compile a census of Benares in 1800, Sital Singh took the opportunity to embellish it with descriptions of 48 different kinds of ascetic residing in

offensive to Hindus"? Vernacular education, history textbooks and the waq'at controversy of the 1860s in colonial North India', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Series 3*, 24.1 (2014), pp. 75–95, doi:10.1017/S1356186313000606.

⁹ Avril Powell, 'History textbooks and the transmission of the pre-colonial past in NW India in the 1860s and 1870s', in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, (ed.) Daud Ali (New Delhi, 1999), pp. 91–133; Ulrike Stark, 'Through subaltern eyes: Shivaprasad at Simla, 1846–1852', *Summerhill: IIAS Review* 17.1 (2012), pp. 23–33.

¹⁰ The manuscript is IO Islamic 4085, fols. 97–101, British Library, London. Ganga Bishan is credited with a couple of other compositions, a Persian lexicon (MS 1440, Asiatic Society of Bengal) and a miscellany with notes on Hindu mythology and Sufism in Persian and Urdu (MS 1717, Asiatic Society of Bengal, dated 1818–1825). He is not to be confused with another munshi, Ram Sita Singh, who also used the pen name 'Fikrat'.

¹¹ Mazhar Hasan Kurawi, *Tārīkh-i Banāras*, 1st edn, vol. 2 (Benares, 1926), pp. 543–544.

Benares, to which he added a Persian philosophical defence of Vedanta, using only the Persian and Arabic vocabulary of later Islamic philosophers to make his points.¹²

The first edition of the Persian poems of Sital Singh came out in print with the title *Khayāl-i Bikhwudī* ('Imagination of the Selfless') in 1851, near the time the *Simla News* article was published, with the support of the Raja of Benares.¹³ Then a second printing of *Khayāl-i Bikhwudī* was produced in Benares at the Kashi Press in 1273/1857 (the title is a chronogram for 1273). The text was edited by none other than Shivaprasad, who described the volume in classic munshi style:

[It is] one of the writings of my revered teacher, qibla of both worlds and Ka'ba of worldlings, my qibla, Munshi Sital Singh sahib known as Bikhwud, may God lengthen his shadow and extend his perfection . . . [coming] from the error-prone pen of the slave, the least of servants, Pandit Shivaprasad—may God forgive his sins and conceal his faults with good.¹⁴

All this goes to show that Sital Singh was unquestionably viewed with the greatest respect among the munshis, so it is clear why he was the authority who was asked to clarify how to respond to the question of the immortality of the soul.

Responding to the letter

The identity of the author of the letter to the *Simla News* is not known. Shivaprasad evidently decided that the topic was too weighty for him to handle alone, so he sent two copies of the newspaper to Fikrat, asking the latter to show it to Sital Singh and request him to opine on the subject. The letter begins on a forceful note, announcing that it will deal with a scientific question, not a religious one, to be solved by reason rather than traditional authority. It questions the possibility of the soul existing apart from the body, pointing to modern medical findings that locate different mental and emotional functions in different parts of the brain. The English are cited as denying that animals have intellects, a conclusion that the letter writer finds doubtful, though he ends by denying that mind or consciousness can exist without the brain. Evidently this argument was initially considered scientific and 'useful' enough to be published, but it caused some consternation when it came time to compose a reply that could appear in the newspaper.

Sital Singh in his response did not take the bait of treating the immortality of the soul as a question susceptible to scientific proof. He acknowledged that he understood the point of the letter, pausing to digress by quoting a spurious verse by Sadi so he could make a pun on his pen name ('selfless'). He then addressed the question of the immortality of the spirit as a fundamentally political one, following the Platonic notion of religion as a noble lie, a doctrine implicitly supported by Farabi and Ibn Sina in their philosophical writings. That is, the entire basis of morality and public order rests on the promise of reward and punishment in the afterlife. If the masses and the criminally minded can be assured that immortality is a fiction, disproved by modern science, then there is no limit to the damage that will be done to society. It is striking that neither Sital Singh nor the junior munshis bothered to refute the argument that the soul disappears at the time of the body's death. Indeed, Sital Singh is scathing in his portrayal of the masses being manipulated by religious authorities with such religious doctrines. He treats the

¹² Carl W. Ernst, 'A Persian philosophical defense of Vedanta', in *Voices of Three Generations: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, (eds) Mohammad H. Faghfoory and Katherine O'Brien (Chicago, 2019), pp. 11–37.

¹³ Shakespear et al., 'On the native press', p. 79.

¹⁴ Sital Singh 'Bikhwud', *Dīwān*, (ed.) Shivaprasad (Benares, 1272/1857), pp. 70–71.

fiction of the afterlife as a secret that, like the esoteric truths of philosophy in general, should be rigorously kept from the unworthy. Fikrat's closing verse simply emphasises this point. As a result, all indications are that the letter went unanswered, as the munshis decided that it was preferable to ignore it and avoid controversy.

The increasing irrelevance of the munshi

So what does this correspondence tell us about the position of the munshis at the mid-point of the nineteenth century, in the wrenching transition from the late Mughal cosmos to the brave new world of the colonial regime? Sital Singh had realised some years previously that there was no going back. In a comprehensive survey of Hinduism completed around 1809, entitled *The Charm of Manifestation*, he presented a summary of the Sanskrit curriculum on all major subjects of learning. In so doing, he supplied not only the Arabic or Persian equivalents of the Sanskrit categories of knowledge, but also the English ones (e.g. Sanskrit shastra = Arabic *fiqh* = English 'code').

In later years, Sital Singh followed this theoretical concession to the new epistemology with practical measures. He established a charitable trust in his own name in 1843, to be administered by the colonial authorities, with the funds to be used to support the education of Hindu boys in a modern scientific curriculum in schools run by missionaries.¹⁵ His students seem to have been interested in the new technology of printing, judging from a treatise one of them published in Urdu in 1848.¹⁶ Yet they do not appear to have appreciated the possible transformations that might result from widespread literacy and mass media. It is understandable that, with a newspaper like the *Simla Akhbār*, which had such a tiny number of subscribers, it might not have been easy for the munshis to grasp the potential effects of journalism on a larger scale.

The compilation of these texts by Fikrat remained very much in the courtly style of Persian culture. The Hindu munshis regularly use terms that echo standard Islamic religious language, such as the Islamic blessings at the beginning of the letter, and the expression 'souls that command evil' (*nufūs-i ammāra*, an allusion to Quran 12:53, and the phrase 'the Hindus' scripture' (*umm al-kitāb*, Quran 3:7). The contents of the other treatises in the anthology reflect the mixture of cultural and administrative topics that defined the munshis' activities: (1) a letter from Fikrat to another munshi, thanking him for sending a copy of the *Dabistān*, the well-known eclectic Persian treatise on religions; (2) Fikrat's narrative of his travels across northern India in 1850–1851; (3) an account of a meeting between a raja and the British governor-general in 1849; (4) a *Rām Gītā* in Persian composed by Sital Singh; (5) 'The Spirit Explained', the text presented here; and (6) an untitled work on metaphysics.¹⁷

As far as the natural sciences were concerned, it was already clear to many that the new order had to be accepted. Yet it is doubtful that Sital Singh held the same view of colonial approaches to language, religion, and culture. His brief response to the letter in the *Simla News* steadfastly maintained the lofty tone of Persianate literature and philosophy inflected by Sufism, which he had spent a lifetime cultivating. His willingness to

¹⁵ The later career of Sital Singh is discussed in: Carl Ernst, 'The end of Persianate Hinduism', in *The Routledge Handbook of Hindu-Muslim Relations*, (ed.) Peter Gottschalk (forthcoming).

¹⁶ Sital Singh is incorrectly listed as author of a treatise on the principles of printing entitled *Qanūn al-intibā'* (Delhi, 1848), in J. F. Blumhardt, *Catalog of the Library of the India Office*, vol. 2, part 2, *Hindustani Books* (London, 1900), p. 2. The actual author is Budh Singh Khatri, who describes himself on p. 2 as 'the least of the students of the master and guide to truth, the absolute prayer direction and Ka'ba, the source of emanation, who is connected to sanctity, Munshi Sital Singh sahib, may God extend his shadow'.

¹⁷ Fihrist: Union Catalogue of Manuscripts from the Islamicate World, https://www.fihrist.org.uk/catalog/manuscript_18125 (accessed 20 June 2023).

conceal the implications of modern medicine from the public, as a measure to shore up the religious basis of morality, owes more to Farabi than to David Hume. Sital Singh may have had some familiarity with European debates on philosophy and religion, through his close friendship with the maverick Greek Indologist, Demetrios Galanos (1760–1833), who spent decades in Benares translating Sanskrit texts into modern Greek. Sital Singh praised Galanos as ‘the Plato of the age’ in a Persian quatrain inscribed as an elegy on the tombstone of Galanos. Such perspectives could have furnished Sital Singh with parallels to the rationalist thinkers of the Persianate sphere, but he did not draw upon the radical implications of the Enlightenment to replace Sadi and Ibn Arabi.

For Shivaprasad things would be different. While his cover letter does not explain his thinking about the letter, in hindsight one might imagine him dealing with it as a policy decision on the kinds of communication that were appropriate to be published in a newspaper. Although the technology of print was creating new publics and new social imaginaries, the munshis’ reflection on this letter to the editor seems to have treated it as if it were a manuscript. Yet in other respects Shivaprasad was shifting his attitudes towards the styles of cultural production in which he had been trained. He had readily absorbed Sir Henry Elliott’s wholesale condemnation of Muslim rule in India, and he began to move away from the acceptance of Hindustani as a common mother tongue of Indians, becoming a major advocate of replacing Urdu with a Hindi language suitable for a largely Hindu nation.

Gradually, the positions advocated by Shivaprasad became hardened, enhanced by the concepts of race, language, religion, and culture that had become the main currency of the colonial era. The Persianate culture in which he was still immersed in 1850, and which he celebrated by publishing Sital Singh’s poetic works in 1857, became anachronistic after that date, marked by revolt against British rule and all the reprisals that followed. Explaining the reasons for Shivaprasad’s alienation from the worldview of his early training is beyond the scope of this article, but his development into a spokesperson for new concepts of identity is unmistakable. By 1868, his full-throated cry for the rejection of Urdu employed all the rhetoric of racial, linguistic, and religious purity that has become the hallmark of nationalism. Thus he could say, with bold defiance:

I cannot see the wisdom of the policy which thrusts a Semitic element into the bosoms of Hindus and alienates them from their Aryan speech; not only speech, but all that is Aryan, because through speech ideas are formed, and through ideas the manners and customs. To read Persian is to become Persianised, all ideas become corrupt and our nationality is lost. Cursed be the day which saw the Muhammadans cross the Indus; all the evils which we find amongst us, we are indebted for to our ‘beloved brethren’ the Muhammadans.¹⁸

At this point, there is no longer any question about the successful transmission of European ideologies of modernity to India, although Shivaprasad ironically seems not to have understood that the British assigned Persian to the category of Aryan, not Semitic, languages.

But the other munshis retained habits formed by the earlier regime; their debates were still conducted in Persian, embellished with flourishes of Arabic and Sanskrit. Their discussion of the letter rejecting immortality is ironic. They treated the newspaper as though it were a manuscript destined to be restricted to an elite audience. And their discussion was carried out with little awareness that newspapers would soon become a medium of mass communication, composed in a vernacular language and increasingly disconnected

¹⁸ Babu Shivaprasad, *Memorandum: Court Characters in the Upper Provinces of India* (Benares, 1868), p. 5.

from premodern canons. As a result, at this juncture the munshis did not fully realise that it would not be long until their services would no longer be required. And with no response to the letter being published, the spirit remained unexplained.

Translation of 'The Spirit Explained'

1. Preface

He is the Eternal.
In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate.

Now, says Fikrat: Babu Shivaprasad, grandson¹⁹ of the late Raja Dalchand, who is in charge of the superintendency of Simla, sent a note addressed to this humble one with a couple of copies of the *News*, so that I would send him an answer to the question asked of the wise, concerning journalistic content and its truthfulness, together with the approval of another consultation, which was obtained from the revered Bīkhud. Since both question and answer are worthy of acceptance by the intelligent, having conveyed them along with the note of the well-guided Shivaprasad, I entitled it 'The Spirit Explained', and the reason for naming it will itself become evident from the question and answer. Verse:

Listen, teacher of subtleties!
'The Spirit Explained', is the name of this treatise.

2. Cover letter

Copy of the note of Babu Shivaprasad-ji addressed to this nameless writer [i.e. Fikrat]: For the pillar of friendship and the essence of kindness, and because of the separation that causes the longing to meet, the time to meet has passed, so seeking it is necessary. Two copies of the *Simla Akhbār*, courtesy of Mawlavi sahib (Sayyid Abdullah) are on their way to you. Having mentioned that to my honoured teacher, Munshi Sital Singh, on the condition that he approves, if you would let that unique one of the time read the following details from said newspapers, and return both newspapers to Mawlavi sahib, it would not lack grace and generosity. Farewell—that is all.
Cordially, Shivaprasad, 2 June.

[Prefatory note in Devanagari:] The Veda, happiness, reincarnation (*veda*, *khushī*, *punarjanma*). [Marginal comments:] Veda—the Hindus' scripture. The meaning of *khushī* is happiness (*sukh*), according to the writer. *Punarjanma*—entry of the spirit into another body until it finds its reward.

3. Text

Summary of a letter written by a writer to explain the annihilation²⁰ of spirit.

To the editor of the *Simla Akhbār*, greetings. People may perhaps imagine that my objective in writing on this topic is to stir up a religious matter. But they should know that I do not ask this from a religious (*mazhabī*) perspective; it is only a scientific (*ilmī*) question,

¹⁹ Shivaprasad was actually the great-grandson of Dalchand.

²⁰ In other contexts, 'annihilation' (*fanā*) can be a Sufi concept of eliminating the ego, but here it is the ephemeral character of ordinary existence.

and I want its answer to be rational (*ma'qūl*), not traditional (*manqūl*). And the question is what the Vedantists say: 'As the mind, so the individual; bondage or liberation are in the mind' (in Devanagari: *mana eva manushyanam karanam bandha mokshayoho*), i.e., 'mind is the cause of man's binding and release'.²¹ The belief of these people requires that mind is the product (*dharma*) of the soul. That is, when the soul becomes separate from the body, then mind, intellect, knowledge, and consciousness continue in it. But it is necessary to reflect a little, that when the faculties of action and knowledge are destroyed, its existence (*vritti*) does not remain. In this manner, from the destruction of the inner faculty, how will the destruction of its existence not occur? See how someone who from the womb is born blind; as long as he remains blind, he will never be able to distinguish black from white. But if seeing has been the product of the soul, how is it that without an eye he cannot see?

In this way, mind, intellect, knowledge, and consciousness cannot continue without the brain. Physicians (*ḥakīms*) have established that in the human brain different things are located in different sections, e.g., one is for emotion, one is for guilt, one is for desire, one is for anger, one is for fear, one is for sorrow. But these physicians have tested this to such an extent that with people who have fractured the skull in some place, by placing the hand on the brain one can tell what is the function of that place. Since that function is not within the soul, its location remains the restless brain. And when desire, anger, etc., occur to that person, it is from the mind, but no function enters the soul. Its place is entirely the brain, except in the case of this experiment, that anyone having a skull of such size or of such kind, that is, such that in the skull the brain rests on more or less the same spot, the light of his intellect and the existence of his mind will be just so.

The English say that God only gives intellect to humans, not to animals. But in our understanding, animals are composed of the same things that we are; their soul is just like ours. The difference is that their skull and brain are not made in the same fashion as ours. Therefore the light of their intellect and the existence of their mind are not the same as ours. But observe this, that when the brain suffers from an injury or illness in some part of the skull, the suffering affects the location of a certain function. A defect occurs in that function, and from the entry of the defect into the brain, a man becomes mad, palpitating, insane, and unconscious. All these are faculties of the soul; that is, can mind, intellect, knowledge, or consciousness continue in him without a brain? And will no defect occur then in all these functions from the entry of defects in the brain? I mean by these points that there can be no mind, intellect, knowledge, or consciousness, without a brain. Just as when a mirror is broken, what we used to see in it no longer remains, then it is the same situation: on abandoning the human form, the brain no longer remains, so how can mind, intellect, knowledge, and consciousness remain? And when mind does not continue, who is the agent that binds the soul? In that case, it must be involuntary release. That is all.

4. Response

The reply from *Bīkhwad Bā-khudā*,²² addressed to Shivaprasad-ji. From the faqir Bīkhwad, after a prayer, greeting, and complete affection, at the request of the author of the letter of illustrious name, written on the annihilation of spirits after the destruction of bodies, I have seen and understood it. Although Sadi has previously described the state of the

²¹ This widely quoted saying is the second line in the late yoga text known as the *Amritabindu Upanishad*. A marginal gloss adds: *moksha* (in Devanagari), *najāt* (Persian for 'salvation').

²² Sital Singh was commonly referred to by this epithet, 'without self, but with God'.

selfless (*Bikhwud*), ‘What shall the selfless say about the traceless?’²³ still I can write something in answer to the question.

It should be understood, regarding the adherents of the religious laws (*muqalladīn-i sharā’i*) of every tribe and community (*qawm wa millat*), who are bound by traditions (*manqūlāt*), that they necessarily differ on this point, though one can generally detect a whiff of esoteric truths from certain philosophers, mystics, and realisers of truth. One may say that from the perspective of social regulation, the resurrection, judgement, paradise, and the recompense of every good and bad action, is all based upon the immortality of the spirit. Considering with utter disdain the veil of authority (*nāmūs*) that the masters of religious laws have thrown before the sight of the cross-eyed, they [the philosophers] have remained silent on this matter, lest the attainment of knowledge should be considered destructive for the general welfare. For in spite of the demonstration of the immortality of the spirit and the belief in the rewards of deeds, etc., what crimes have not been committed? From souls that command evil, what bloodshed, theft of goods, and injury of the weak [will occur] among their own kith and kin, deeds which were never inflicted by the hand of infidels? God forbid! If they become certain of the annihilation of spirit, and emerge from the shackles of religious laws, their fear of hell will wane, and they will be much more inclined to do evil. And when no hope of heaven remains, the justice and fear with which they desired otherworldly profit they will now recognise as foolish. Therefore, this is a secret to be understood, but not spoken. One should live as a realiser of truth inwardly, but as a conformist outwardly. Verse:

From this tall beauty, trouble may reach its height;
don’t breathe a word of her tall height and stature.

5. Epigraph

Says Fikrat:

Listen to a single point that’s better than a book:
the curious talker will last longer when mute.

Edition of ‘The Spirit Explained’²⁴

هو الباقي

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

اما بعد فکرت گوید که بابو شیو پرشاد نبیره راجه دالچند مرحوم که سر رشته دار سپرنشندنتی²⁵ شمله است رقعہ بنام خاکسار مع دو قطعہ اخبار فرستادہ . تا جواب سوالی کہ مندرج اخباری و حق شعاری از محققان کردہ مع استحسان دیگر استصواب از حضرت بیخودی فرا گرفته بدو فرستم . چون سوال و جواب هر دو قابل قبول ارباب معقول است . مع رقعہ شیو پرشاد با رشاد منقول کردہ بہ **روح مشروح** نامزد میکنم . و وجہ تسمیہ خود از سوال و جواب ظاہر خواهد شد

²³ This verse is not found in the writings of Sadi.

²⁴ The following pages consist of a diplomatic edition that follows the original manuscript as closely as possible. This includes red ink for headings and certain terms, traditional punctuation with verse markers for poetry and triple dots as separators (please note that the red ink is only visible in the online version of this article); minimal modern punctuation has been added. Pagination of the manuscript is given in square brackets. The Nandinagari characters ‘na’ and ‘ksh’ are replaced here with standard Devanagari equivalents. The undotted Urdu nasalised ‘nūn’ is not used in the manuscript, so the dotted ‘nūn’ appears instead.

²⁵ Superintendency (sic).

بشنو ای خرده دان علامہ *

روح مشروح نام این نامہ *

[97b] نقل **رقعہ بابو شیو پرشاد جی بنام راقم گمنام**۔ عمدہ رفا و زبده شفا را اشقاقہ اظہار اشتیاق ملاقات بر وقت ملاقات گذاشتہ بمطلب ضروری می گراید * و قطعہ اخبار شملہ از جانب مولویصاحب بخدمت آمہریان خواہد رسید * ذکر آن بخدمت مخدومی جناب منشی سیٹل سینگہ صاحب کردہ بشرط بودن پسند خاطر ایشان اگر چیز ہای مفصلہ ذیل از اخبار ہای مذکور بخدمت آن یکتای زمانہ خواندہ دہند * و باز ان ہر دو اخبار را حوالہ مولویصاحب فرمایند * خالی از لطف و احسان نخواہد بود * والسلام فقط * رقیم الوداد شیو پرشاد 2 جون :
वेद²⁶ : पु न र ज न्म²⁷ : खु सी²⁸ : वेद²⁸

خلاصہ مکتوب کاتبی کہ فئای روح رامشروح نوشت * شملہ اخبار کے مہتمم صاحب سلامت * لوگ شاید خیال کریں گے کہ ہماری غرض اس مضمون کے لکھنے سے کچھ چھیڑ چھاڑ کرنے کی ہے لیکن اونکو رہے کہ یہ بات مذہب کی راہ سے نہیں پوچھے * صرف ایک علمی سوال ہے * اور اسکا جواب بھی ہم معقول چاہتے ہیں نہ منقول * اور وہ سوال یہ ہے کہ ویدانتی [98a] لوگ کہتے ہیں * * *

म न ए व म नु ष्या णां का र णं बं घ मो क्ष षो

یعنی من ہی کے سبب آدمی بندھتا ہے اور موکش²⁹ ہوتا ہے * ان لوگوں کے عقیدے کے بموجب من جیو کا دھرم ہے * یعنی جب جیو شریر سے جدا ہوتا ہے * تو بھی اوسمین من بدھی چت ابنکار بنا رہتا ہے * اب ذرا غور کرنا چاہئے * کہ جیسے کرم اندری اور گیان اندری کے ناش ہونے سے اونکی برتی باقی نہیں رہتی * اوسی طرح انتر اندری کے نشٹ ہونے سے اونکی برتی بھی کیوں نہ نشٹ ہوجاویگی * دیکھو جو با کے سٹ سے اندھا جنمنا ہے * وہ جب تک اندھا رہیگا ہر گز کالے اور پیلے کا فرق نکرسکیگا * پس جو دیکھنا جیو کا دھرم ہوتا * تو وہ بنا انکہ کے بھی کیوں نہ دیکھ سکتا

اسطرح من بدھی چت ابنکار بنا دماغ کے نہیں رہ سکتا حکیمون نے ثابت کیا ہے کہ آدمی کے دماغ میں جدا جدا چیز کے جدا جدا حصے مقرر ہیں * مثلاً کوئی راگ کا کوئی دولش کا کوئی کام کا کوئی کرودھ کا کوئی بھی کا کوئی شوک کا اتیادی * بلکہ اون حکیمون نے اسکی بیان تک [98b] ازمایش کی ہے * جن لوگوں کی اتفاقاً کسی مقام سے کھوپڑی ٹوٹ گئی ہے * بھیجے پر ہاتھ رکھکر معلوم کر لیا ہے * کہ جس بات کا وہ مقام تھا جب وہ بات آدمی کے جی میں نہ آتی اوس جگہ کا بھیجا ستھر رہتا * اور جس وقت اوس آدمی کو کام کرودھ و غیرہ میں سے کوئی بات جی میں گزر آتی اوس مقام کا بھیجا بھر کنے لگتا۔ سوائے اسکے یہ بھی ازمانی ہوی بات ہے * کہ جس آدمی کی جنتی بڑی اور جیسی کھوپڑی ہوتی ہے * یعنی جسکی کھوپڑی میں جس جس مقام پر جیسا زیادہ یا کم بھیجا رہتا ہے * ویسا ہی اوسکی بدھی کا پرکاش اور من کی برتی ہوتی ہے۔

[انگریز لوگ کہتے ہیں کہ³⁰ ایشور نے بدھی فقط آدمی ہی کو دی ہے * حیوانات کو نہیں دی * پر ہماری سمجھ میں حیوانات بھی اونہیں چیزوں سے بنے ہیں جس سے ہم لوگ بنے ہیں اونکا جیو بھی ہمارے ہی جیو سا ہے * پر فرق اتنا ہے کہ اونکی کھوپڑی اور بھیجا اسطرح کا نہیں بنا * جیسا ہملوگوں کا ہے * اور اسواسطے اونکی بدھی کا پرکاش اور من کی برتی [99a] بھی ایسی نہیں ہوتی * جیسی ہماری ہے * سوائے اس کے یہ بھی دیکھو کہ جب آدمی کے دماغ میں یعنی کھوپڑی کے کسی حصے میں چوٹ یا بیماری و غیرہ سے کچھ خرابی آجاتی ہے * اوسی بات میں خلل پرتا ہے اسی دماغ میں خلل آنے سے آدمی دیوانہ اور خفقانی اور بڑا اور بیہوش ہوجاتا ہے * جو یہ سب دھرم جیو ہی کا ہوتا یعنی بنا دماغ کے من بدھی چت ابنکار اوسمین رہ سکتا * تو دماغ میں خلل آنے سے ان سب باتونمین خلل نہیں پڑتا * ہماری مراد ان باتوں سے یہی ہے * بنا دماغ کے من بدھی چت ابنکار نہیں ہو سکتا * جیسے آبنہ ٹوٹ جانے سے اوسمین جو پرتی تم دیکھلائی دیتا تھا ہر گز باقی نہیں رہتا * پس جب یہی بات ہے * تو آدمی کا شریر پر تیاگ ہونے پر دماغ باقی نہ رہے سے من بدھی چت ابنکار کہاں باقی رہیگا * اور جب من ہی باقی نہ رہا * تو پھر جیو کے بھندن کا کارن کون ہوگا * اوسکو تو انایاس موکش ہونا چاہئے فقط
جواب از بیخود با خدا بنام شیو پرشاد جی۔ از فقیر بیخود بعد از دعا و سلام و اشتیاق تمام التماس آنکہ [99b] کاتب خط نام نامی آنچه در اندام ارواح بعد انهدام اجسام نوشتہ دیدم و در یافتہ * ہر چند سعدی از حال بیخودان

²⁶ पु न र ज न्म (marginal note). در آمدن روح بقالب دیگر تا جزا یابند

²⁷ (marginal note). مراد از سکھ نزد راقم

²⁸ वे द (marginal note). ام الکتب ہنود

²⁹ मो क्ष (marginal note). نجات

³⁰ (Marginal insertion).

پیش ازین خبر داده **ع**

بیخود از بی نشان چه گوید باز **د**
 لیکن بجواب سوال چیزی توان نوشت **د** مشهود باد که مقلدین شرائع هر قوم و ملت که پا بند منقولاتند **د** لا محاله
 ازین کلام اختلاف نمایند **د** و از رموز بعض حکما و عرفا و محققین استثنای توان کرد **د** گو نظر بر انتظام
 جمهوری که بنای بعث و نشر و جنت و مکافات نیک و بد هر کردار بر بقای روح است **د** در صراحت قباحات
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 جهت نفوس اماره چه بلاها از سفک دما و عصب اشیا و ایضای ضعیفای نوع و جنس خود که از دست مشرکان
 بظهور نمی آید **د** معاذ الله **د** اگر بر فنای روح متیقن شوند **د** و از قیود شرائع بیرون روند **د** بیم دوزخ زائل و در
 بدکاری زیاده تر مائل گردند **د** و چون امید بهشت نماند **د** [100a] داد و دهشیکه بطمع سود آخرت می کنند **د**
 فضول شناسند **د** لهذا این راز فهمیدنی است **د** نه گفتنی **د** باطناً محققانه ظاهراً مقلدانه زیستن باید **د** و بس **ع**

شود فتنه بالا ازین راستی **د**

مزن دم از آن قد و بالای راست **د**

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