AWADH / A MUSIC DRAMA BY AGHA HASAN AMANAT

Indar Sabha

The four fairies of Indar’s court

An English retelling from the illustrated playbook printed by Munshi Newal Kishore in Lucknow in April 1880.



Sabz Pari reaches the throne. Detail from the printed play, p. 13.

SCENE 01

The king misses an entrance

In the heaven imagined by the Lucknow poet Agha Hasan Amanat, even the seasons arrive when a singer calls them. Raja Indar wants to see his fairies perform. Pukhraj Pari, dressed in the yellow of a topaz, brings mustard into flower and sets the ears of wheat swaying. Nilam Pari claims a sapphire’s worth, then asks the king to attend to the skill of her singing. Lal Pari’s turn brings the monsoon. What pleasure can rain give, she sings, when the person you want beside you is far away?

Sabz Pari comes last. She calls herself a leaf in the royal garden. She takes one look at the throne. The king is asleep. She leaves him there.

SCENE 02

A ring on a sleeping hand

Out in the garden, Sabz calls for Kala Dev, a spirit who can travel between her world and ours. On an earlier flight she saw a young man asleep on a palace roof. She left him with her ring on his hand. Now she wants to see him awake. Kala Dev is to look for the sleeper who wears it.

He brings her the prince. Sabz shakes Gulfam by the shoulder, and the prince wakes among strangers. He wants to know where he has been taken, who brought him here, and who this winged woman is. She tells him what his sleeping face had done to her. He hears something else in her story that interests him greatly. This woman dances for Indar.



The sleeping prince and Sabz Pari. Detail from p. 14.

SCENE 03

What Gulfam wants to see

Gulfam has heard stories of the heavenly assembly in the world below. If Sabz will take him there just once, he says, he will give her his word. She knows what happens to a mortal who crosses that boundary. She argues. He insists. At last she agrees to hide him where he can watch while she performs.

Lal Dev, the red spirit, discovers their secret. The king orders the intruder brought before him. Gulfam tries to take the blame. He tells Indar that the fairy is innocent and he came of his own accord. It does neither of them any good. Indar has Gulfam confined in a well at Mount Qaf. For Sabz he orders a punishment that cuts off her own way home. Her wings are taken from her and she is driven out.

SCENE 04

The singer on foot

The printer puts the lovers on one page. Above, Gulfam looks out from the mouth of the well. Below, a peacock and deer listen to a woman with a stringed instrument. She is Sabz. She goes about now as a jogin, a wandering woman ascetic. In her song she counts the streets she has searched for news of the prince.

Word of a remarkable musician reaches the king through Kala Dev. Indar sends him to fetch her. He wants a song. She wants him to make good on the reward a king offers a performer. When she sits down before the throne again, Indar has no idea whose voice he is about to hear.



Sabz Pari as a wandering musician. Detail from p. 24.

SCENE 05

The price of a song

Indar offers the jogin a folded betel leaf. What use has she for the red it would bring to her lips? Separation has already coloured them. He offers her a garland. The only thing she wants round her neck is her beloved’s arm. He offers her a shawl. Love keeps her warm enough.

Once the king has pledged his word, she names her reward. Bring Gulfam out of the well. Grant that, and the musician he has summoned will have everything she came for. Indar recognises Sabz and sends Lal Dev himself to fetch the prisoner. The lovers finally get to tell each other what happened while they were apart. In the printed duet, one heading gives her reply, the next gives his. The other fairies join their celebration. Only after the chorus does the printer give the reader the one word that closes Amanat’s play. Finished.

Four voices on the page

Facsimile details and new English translations from Amanat’s play.

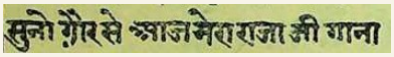
PUKHRAJ PARI / P. 2

I sing, and dancing is always my work.



NILAM PARI / P. 6

Listen closely to my song today, my king.



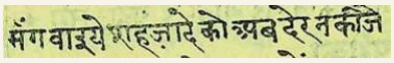
LAL PARI / P. 10

Without my beloved, the rain clouds give me no pleasure.



SABZ PARI / P. 31

Send for the prince. Delay no longer.



EDITION & FURTHER READING

Read the published English translation

Afroz Taj, The Court of Indar and the Rebirth of North Indian Drama. Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu (Hind), 2007. Urdu and English. Rekhta may ask readers to register after its guest allowance.

See the April 1880 Lucknow title page

Newal Kishore Press. The illustrated Devanagari volume brings Amanat and Madari Lal together. This retelling follows Amanat’s play, which ends on printed page 33.

Turn the pages of Amanat’s play

Illustrated Devanagari text, printed pp. 1–33. Digitised by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. The English prose and short line translations were written for this exhibit.

Read a scholarly account in English

Amir Theilhaber, Friedrich Rosen, chapter 2. Printed pp. 109 and 111 follow the plot from the opening songs to the return of Gulfam.

Examine the 1875 Urdu edition

Rekhta catalogues this Lucknow volume under Munshi Nawal Kishor. Its title names both playwrights.

Image details from the eGangotri and Sarayu Trust scans. Select a source to open it.