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Qiṣṣa-e Aurat Dalla¹

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Introduction

The translation presented here is of a text belonging to the *qiṣṣa* genre. The *qiṣṣa* is often used coterminously with the *dastān* and both literally refer to story in Urdu with more specific connotations in their languages of origin, that is Arabic and Persian respectively. The earliest studies on this genre were done by William L. Hanaway and Frances Pritchett, who described it as a prose romance which was first orally recited before being committed to writing (Pritchett 1-3). Pritchett has categorised *qiṣṣa* literature into two subsets: the “core” *qiṣṣas* centred around marvellous quests of a virtuous hero, whereas the “outer layer” consisting of *qiṣṣas* centred around sexual encounters and to a much lesser extent, stories where love triumphs (5).

This *qiṣṣa* begins with an invocation (also seen in works of Nizami and Khusrau) in the upper margin on the first page. Farina Mir (737) showed in her study of Punjabi *qiṣṣas* that invocation (known as *Mangalacharn/Hamd*) served two purposes: praising the spiritual and temporal authority brought divine and worldly blessings on the text and highlighted the circumstances of its composition. The text also made extensive use of Persian vocabulary.

The title and publication details of the *qiṣṣa* are mentioned on the cover page itself. It is thirty-two pages in length published by Maktba Khurshid Alam in 1898 (1316 A.H.). It is named after the central

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character, a woman known as Dalla, who is a trickster and con artist. Hence, this *qiṣṣa* falls in the category of the “outer layer” of the *qiṣṣa* genre, which gained prominence after the mid nineteenth century. This peripheral cluster drew on the displays of treachery by unreliable, cunning women. The narrative interest in *qiṣṣa* tales of the peripheral cluster was provided by the misogynistic outlook of women and often by exploiting sex or mishaps of being deceived in love; a motif known as *triya charitra* common across folktales (Vatuk and Vatuk 21).

The name of the city in which the *qiṣṣa* begins has been mentioned a few more times in the *qiṣṣa* as opposed to many tales in which the name of the city is never mentioned after the first sentence. It is an embedded narrative and contains many smaller stories set within a frame story, all of which are separate escapades of the titular character, Dalla. Her wit and craftiness are so remarkable that she is able to defraud people in any dire situation and fulfil her quests of acquiring wealth and escape unharmed.

Most of the characters in the story are not mentioned by their individual names but rather through other defining characteristics such as age and profession, for instance - the cameleer, the young jeweller, the washerman, the young girl/daughter of the deceased trader and so on. Other than Dalla, the two characters whose names have been mentioned are Khalifa Harun Rashid and his wife, the queen Zubaida. Harun Rashid (also known as Harun al-Rashid) also appeared in Arabian Nights. Harun Rashid was one such king who gained notoriety among literati and storytellers of Arabic literature. The fifth Caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate, he fared as a subject of many anecdotes of *adab* (highbrow) literature (van Leeuwen 62).

The main reason behind selecting this text was that it had not been translated to English and subsequently analysed (in the plethora of data that I came across). The text also had multiple grammatical errors which was a cause of concern in my attempt of its English translation. These errors may be attributed to the fact that the *qiṣṣa* may have been written after being in circulation through oral narration. This would also explain the uninterrupted flow and continuity errors of the tale, such as the use of different currency denominations interchangeably.

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The Story of Dalla

According to legends, there was once a woman named Dalla in the city of Halab. Vixens and conmen of the time were akin to primary kids when faced with her deceptive and treacherous nature. Each day she would thread up a new deceit to bring the wealth and assets of the residents of the city under her possession. She had three daughters all of who were married. Dalla's technique was to put on fancy clothes every day, hold a rosary in her hand and go to an unsuspecting person's house. Through her artful speech and eloquence, she would articulate words of such sensibility and age-old wisdom that she would subdue every individual into subservience. She also had immense knowledge; she was well versed in the languages of many countries and knew many Quranic verses by heart. Hence, her proficiency meant that all those who made her acquaintance respected her. In whichever house Dalla went, she would converse with the womenfolk for a couple of days and acquaint herself with the routes of the house. And, after gaining control she would take her sons-in-law there to take away all the assets and wealth. In this way, a while passed.

Slowly, all the men of the city were defeated by Dalla and became well aware of her tactics. Then, without any other option, they went to the ruler of the city and conveyed their situation. So, the king at once commanded that Dalla be arrested; but for many days the shrewd old woman could not be captured. Only after many trials and efforts the city magistrate learnt of her whereabouts, arrested her and presented her before the king. Listening to her complaints and misdeeds, the king was

so disturbed that he immediately declared she be punished by death by hanging, but the advisors of the court pointed out that killing a woman is prohibited in Islam. Hence, it was deemed appropriate to exile her from the city. The king was impressed by this advice of his council and he exiled Dalla and her daughters from the borders of the city while her sons-in-law were hanged.

Exiled from Halab, Dalla went to the land of Baghdad and rented a house on the outskirts of the city and began residing there peacefully with her daughters. And then for a few days she put on a burqa and roamed around every nook and cranny of the city. Within a short while, she acquired complete knowledge of the markets and palaces of the city. Then, one day, wearing fine clothes and putting on a burqa over them, she left for patrol. She reached a locality lined with grand buildings the door of which was ajar. So, she peeped inside to see that the courtyard of the house had a small, well-groomed and well-adorned garden. Within the garden there was a dais lined with an exquisite flooring, on top of which was a bolster. A beautiful woman with a forehead as bright as the moon was sitting on it.

Seeing this sight, Dalla enquired of the boys playing on the street as to the identity of the owner of the house. She found out that the house belonged to an important merchant of the city of Baghdad who had died a few months ago, leaving behind a daughter of the tender age of fourteen. Now, there wasn't an heir other than this daughter to his property. After learning of this, Dalla went into the building, slowly walked up to the dais and greeted the girl.

Responding to Dalla's greetings she asked, "Oh kind-hearted mother, what is your name? And what coincidence is it that has led you to my house?"

Dalla blessed the girl abundantly and told her that she could not know who Dalla was, adding: "I am a close relative of yours, but my husband and your father had a falling out which is why our paths never crossed. Then I went away from this city to the land of Halab. Now that I have returned, and learnt that your guardian left you in your childhood, I felt immense pain and could not help rushing here to see you."

Hearing this, the girl treated Dalla with utmost hospitality. She was grateful that Dalla treated her with kindness in the absence of her mother and took the trouble to come and see her. Then she called for supper and dined with Dalla. Within a moment, Dalla brought the girl under her control through her recitations of eloquent statements and speech. One

day, Dalla wished farewell to the girl who responded by saying that seeing her affection and elderly wisdom, her heart could not bear to bid Dalla a farewell even for a moment. However, because Dalla could not be separated from her own home, she was compelled to let her go. "Otherwise, I request you to favour me occasionally like this," the girl insisted. Dalla replied that she would definitely come to meet her again and comforted her. Saying so, she bid farewell and visited the girl's house again after a couple of days. That day was also spent in affectionate conversations and advise.

The next day Dalla came to her house looking extremely sad. The girl asked her, "Oh, kind-hearted mother, why do you look so sad today?"

Dalla began to cry. Frightened, the girl entreated her very affectionately to, for the sake of God, state the cause of her sorrow. "If something under my control can take away your pain then I wouldn't regret at all in doing it to help you. In fact, I would look upon my service to you as my good fortune."

Dalla replied that she could not share with her the reasons that had caused her the kind of pain she was suffering. The girl swore Dalla on her life to narrate the complete situation. Then Dalla whispered in her ears, "Oh, beloved sweetheart! The fact of the matter is that yesterday when I came to visit you, my son who is a most splendid and a very handsome young man, had accompanied me and had, through the courtyard, caught a glimpse of you strolling in the garden. Since then, his condition is such that he has neither eaten nor had anything to drink. He has been wailing ever since. I asked the cause for the same, but till yesterday he did not reveal anything. Today when I requested profusely and made him swear on my life, he expressed the cause of his anguish. At first, I admonished him severely and urged him to rid himself of these dreams. He proclaimed that he desires nothing except to see that beautiful girl once more, and that will make his heart happy. And if he is not able to see her, he would lose his life. Hearing his words and seeing his affliction, I began losing my peace of mind and my patience, as I am ashamed to even speak of the thing that he desired. How can I ask you to grant his desire? The truth is, had you not entreated so adamantly and swore me on your life, then, God knows that no matter what may have befallen him, I would have never dared to bring such words upon my tongue." Saying this, Dalla began crying grievously.

The girl consoled her saying, "Oh mother, why are you so anxious

about this? What trouble can it bring to me? If his only wish is to take a look at my face, what harm is that to me?"

Dalla praised her bravado, "*Aafreen-Aafreen!* God has borne you of such virtuous nature and benevolence that my tongue is sadly inefficient in commending you. Now you get up and put on your burqa. Then come with me as good deeds should not be delayed. Who knows what must be the condition of that grief-stricken boy by now?"

The girl invoked the name of Allah and put on her precious clothes. She adorned her body with many jewels and then put on a burqa before leaving the house with Dalla. Dalla left the house and walked towards the market; she kept casting her eyes in every direction. When she reached the busy market-place in the middle of the town, she saw a young jeweller engaged busily in his shopkeeping.

Dalla told the girl to wait there and went and greeted the young man. He asked Dalla, "Oh, kind-hearted mother, why have you bothered to come here?" Dalla sighed disappointedly and said she wanted to speak to him alone. The young man went with her to a place where the two of them were alone, and asked her to utter her command. Dalla replied, "My story is that I am an affluent person of the city of Baghdad and I have a beautiful daughter who is only fourteen years old. Yesterday my daughter and I were walking by this market. The moment she saw you she became infatuated with you and after harassing me and entreating a thousand times, she has now come to the market again to see you. She is longing to talk with you. Although relating this is a grave immodesty on my part, what can I do? Her life is extremely precious to me and I did not know what to do except give in to her wish. Now her life and mine are in your hands."

The young jeweller heard Dalla's entire tale and without suspicion responded, "What objection could I have to this, I am at your service."

Dalla asked him to accompany her. He agreed and shut down his shop after taking two gold coins with him. While Dalla walked ahead, the girl and the young jeweller followed her. When they reached a lane, Dalla saw a washerman's shop which had two sections. The washerman was sitting in the outer one. Dalla walked up to him and whispered that her son and his wife who were walking behind her had been strolling the city since morning and it was now noon. She asked him if they could sit in his shop for some time, catch their breath and eat some food if he did not mind. "You will be given one rupee as reward for the same."

The washerman heard this and replied, "Big sister, my house is

available. All of you please rest here without any qualms at all, and command me to bring food for you.” Dalla gave him one rupee for bringing them food from the market and one rupee as reward for his services. The washerman gave her the key to the house and left to get the food. Dalla said to the girl and young jeweller that the heat was very intense and her house was still at some distance away. “It is better that both of you rest for a while in this washerman’s house. After resting, we will have the food I have sent for and then we will leave.”

On the way, both of them, full of youthful exuberance mixed with the sweetness of longing, had fallen in love, and so they happily agreed to Dalla’s suggestions. Dalla seated them in the section inside the shop, asked them to make themselves comfortable. They agreed to Dalla’s suggestions and the girl gave all her finery and her jewellery to Dalla. Then, the two indulged in leisure. Dalla closed the door and waited for a rider in order to escape with the jewels and wealth. After some time, a cameleer rode past on his camel. Dalla called out to him and said, “I have to take these goods from this house to another house. If you decide on a price and lend me your camel, I can load my goods and transport them. But this house is empty so you will have to wait here to avert any possible danger. I will deliver the goods and come back really soon and pay you your compensation.” The cameleer said that it was fine and that he would take one dinar as the cost for his services. Dalla agreed.

She loaded all the goods along with the clothes in the washerman’s shop, the girl and jeweller’s finery, as well as the jewellery and the gold coins onto the camel, and handed the key of the house to the cameleer. She told him to wait there patiently, as, inside the house there still remained a lot of her property and assets which she would take back in the second round. The cameleer told her to rest assured: “I will not be careless.” Dalla rode the camel home with all the goods, clothes, jewellery, gold coins, and stored it over there.

When the washerman returned to his shop with the food, he found that Dalla was nowhere to be seen; the clothes that were stacked in heaps and piles in the outer part of the house were missing and a cameleer was seated there. He asked the cameleer angrily: “Who are you and why are you sitting in my shop without a care? And that old woman who sent me to fetch food – where has she gone? And where are the clothes that were kept in my shop?”

The cameleer responded by asking the washerman what he was doing there and warned him not to step inside the house: “That old lady

who is the owner of the house has given me the custody of the keys and loaded her goods on the camel and gone off.”

The washerman called the cameleer a fool and asserted that the house belonged to him. In their exasperation to figure out who this person was, both of them got extremely worked up and even engaged in a physical brawl. The noise alerted the girl and the young jeweller inside. The jeweller called out to the washerman. When he opened the door, he saw that the girl and jeweller were sitting inside, all by themselves.

The washerman at once got a hold of the jeweller and asked: “You Rascal! Where has your cunning mother disappeared with my belongings? I will take you to the city magistrate. You have treated me brazenly.” Upon hearing that the old woman was the jeweller’s mother, the cameleer also got hold of the jeweller and threatened to murder him if he did not get back his camel. The jeweller exclaimed: “Fools! Your wits are lost, that woman is in no way my relative, in fact she is the mother of this girl.”

The girl shouted and said that the jeweller was wrong, “How can the old woman be my mother when she is the mother of this jeweller?” Then she addressed the cameleer and said, “You have done me grave injustice, that woman has taken all my clothes and jewels and gone away.”

After the four of them had had this conversation, they realised that all of them had been deceived by the crafty old woman and that, in reality, none of them were at fault. The fact was that all of them had been fooled alike by the deceitful woman’s sleight of hand. They discussed that they should present their case before the ruler of Baghdad, Khalifa Harun Rashid and narrate the entire mishap that had befallen them. Accordingly, the washerman, cameleer and young jeweller, all went to the court and related their sorrowful circumstance. The Khalifa was astonished to hear their tale and ordered the magistrate to find the woman and present her in the court as she was definitely worth a look. He also had an announcement made in the lower city that anyone who got this woman arrested would be given a reward of two thousand rupees.

After the success of this endeavour, Dalla, without fearing arrest did not leave her house for a few days. After some time had passed, one day, she put on fancy clothes, took a rosary in her hand and went into the city. Coincidentally, the washerman, cameleer and young jeweller were all out in search of her and recognized her instantly when they saw her. They caught hold of her and left for the palace at once. When they neared the women’s porch of the traveller’s inn, Dalla asked them if she could go

to the toilet and relieve herself, while they waited outside. They did not object to her request and waited for her outside the porch.

Having said this, Dalla went into the palace to Queen Zubaida Khatun, the wife of Khalifa Harun Rashid. Zubaida looked at Dalla's innocent-looking face, the rosary in her hand and asked her who she was. Dalla addressed her respectfully and claimed to be a virtuous woman. Dalla said: "Whatever wealth and goods I possessed, I spent in the path to God. Now I intend to go to Mecca to perform Hajj. But I do not have anything left to undertake the journey except three slaves. I have not parted from them owing to the love I bear for them and nor are they prepared to leave me. I have come here in your service with the desire that you may carry my request forward to the Khalifa that he may buy these slaves from me. The standing of these slaves is such that one is a washerman, graciously skilled in his craft, the second is a cameleer who has spent his entire life engaged in his vocation and the third is a jeweller, a handsome young man extremely competent in his trade. If you fulfil my need then I will pray for your well-being all my life. And whatever amount you will bestow upon me as courtesy, will also go towards goodwill. By God's grace you will receive rewards for it." Dalla said this with such innocence that Zubaida believed her unquestioningly. Then she sent her eunuch to call for her in the palace, so that she could recommend Dalla's request to the king.

The Khalifa asked Dalla what cost she desired of those slaves. Dalla said, "Protector of the world, I bought these slaves at a cost of five thousand dinars. Now I wish to reach the Ka'aba without delay and will accept just three thousand dinars as their cost." The Khalifa asked for the slaves to be called into the court for he wished to see them first. Dalla informed him that they were at the porch of the traveller's inn. The Khalifa went there to see that the jeweller, cameleer and washerman were all there. He asked them about their professions and all three of them confirmed as asked. The Khalifa was quite impressed and said to Dalla: "I will pay you the price at which you bought these slaves."

Dalla blessed the Khalifa and left with five thousand dinars. Then the Khalifa returned to the court, and Dalla said to Zubaida that she had just one more humble request: "If you accept, it would be a great favour unto me. As I said earlier, the slaves and I have a good rapport and they really admire me. I am apprehensive that they will not let me go at all, and might even create a ruckus. Lend me your clothes to wear and send one of your maidservants with me, for they will not be able to recognize

me in a changed attire. Upon reaching home I will return your clothes with your maidservant.” Zubaida agreed to Dalla’s request and ordered a maidservant to accompany the old woman till her home and return with her outfit. Dalla put on Zubaida’s attire studded with precious stones and jewels, wrapped herself with a white bedsheet and left her old clothes and burqa over there. Due to the changed attire, she passed before the washerman, cameleer and young jeweller without their recognizing her at all.

When they came out of the Khalifa’s palace, she started enquiring of the handmaid about the conditions under Queen Zubaida. She replied there was no use of asking her about it as the queen had thousands of such maids in her service. “I am not valued here at all. Nevertheless, I have as good a status as possible,” she replied.

Dalla claimed it was a terrible calamity that she was in a place where she was not valued at all in spite of being so beautiful and young. “If you agree I can get you appointed as a servant at a trader’s place where you would get all kinds of luxuries and they would treat you with hospitality and love as well.” The maid replied that she would be grateful to Dalla all her life. By trickery, Dalla took her to a trader, settled her price for one thousand dinars, sold her, and headed home.

When the Khalifa came out of the palace and went to the public court, he ordered the slaves to be presented before him. When the three of them came, the Khalifa by way of mercy told them to not worry: “Just like that noble woman, your mistress, held you dear, I too will treat you the same and you will never suffer pain or difficulty. You will be happy and it is also incumbent that you never be disloyal. Do your work with prudence and assiduity.”

The washerman, cameleer and young jeweller were perplexed to hear the Khalifa say these words and started looking at each other’s faces. The Khalifa thought that they weren’t being able to accept separation from the old woman and hence they were disturbed. He asked them to not be alarmed, “I never treat my slaves strictly. I will look after you well.”

Hearing this, all of them shouted at once: “Your honour, we are not slaves. That crafty woman had very cleverly deceived and fooled us. We had arrested her and brought her before you so that she would be properly dealt with, once and for all. But it seems that she has also defrauded you.”

On hearing this, the Khalifa asked them to explain the whole matter. They explained the details of all that had befallen them. On hearing about

their circumstances, the Khalifa was extremely amused. Laughing, he came into the palace and narrated the entire tale to Zubaida. Zubaida said:

“O Protector of the World,” this woman is a bizarre one. She did not spare me, either. She has fled with a fancy outfit and maidservant of mine.” The Khalifa and Zubaida reflected on the entire matter and laughed a lot. When the Khalifa came out of the palace, although he tried to control himself, every now and then he would be reminded of Dalla’s trickery and he would laugh uncontrollably again and again. Consequently, the courtiers humbly asked:

“Your honour what has happened today that you are laughing uncontrollably time and again?”

The Khalifa narrated the entire matter to them. All the men of the court started laughing upon hearing this tale and commented that in reality this woman was very skilled at her art. Perhaps no one was as cunning and artful as her, in the entire veiled world. However, they believed that it was imperative she be arrested and appropriately punished. Otherwise, in a matter of days she would trap the city in her net of deceit and plunder it. The Khalifa ordered that Dalla be arrested and had it announced publicly that whosoever got Dalla arrested would be given a reward of two thousand dinars. Accordingly, the magistrate made the announcement to find Dalla dead or alive. The magistrate was also on the lookout for Dalla, every single moment of the day, but could not find any sign of her.

A few days later, Dalla set out once again, with an intent to hunt. But as fate would have it when she reached the city gate, the young jeweller was passing by and he arrested her immediately. However, Dalla tried to scare him, but he did not listen and said: “Remember, this time you will not be able to escape with your life unharmed.”

Dalla understood that threatening him will not work. She assumed a demeanour of extreme humility and adulation: “Oh, worthy young man, please state your issue. My arrest and disgrace will not yield anything for you. If you let me take the lead, I will not be economical in doing you favours.” The young jeweller replied that he had no concern with her, except that she return his personal effects, including the two sets of gold coins. Dalla replied:

“Alright, come with me to my house. I will return your things to you.” Upon hearing this the young jeweller began following Dalla. Dalla roamed the streets and stopped in front of a house, the door of which was covered with a curtain. She asked the young jeweller to take off his shawl

and give it to her so that she may wrap his clothes and gold coins in them and bring them to him. The young jeweller did not find any reason to doubt this request as an unfavourable one. He took off his shawl and gave it to her. Dalla went into the porch and hid inside the niche of the door and called out to the young jeweller to enter inside. He thankfully and unhesitatingly went inside the house and Dalla immediately got out of the niche of the door and vanished.

When the young jeweller stepped inside, he saw that it was the women's quarters and the owner of the house was sitting on the bed puffing a hookah. When the owner saw him, he was enraged. Holding the pipe of the hookah in his hand he ran after the young jeweller and started beating him. The young jeweller cried for help but he did not listen. He kept hitting him repeatedly while retorting: "Wearing white clothes innocently like a saint you have entered a man's house to steal in broad daylight. Are you not afraid of the Supreme Judge?"

The young jeweller supplicated: "Sir, I have been brought here by the lady of the house. You are at my head without any reason."

Hearing this the owner of the house got even more enraged and said: "You are an incredibly impudent man that you are slandering my simple and chaste wife."

Saying so, he got a hold of the jeweller, beat him hard with all his strength and made his condition worse while paying no heed to the young man's pleas professing innocence. When he got tired of hitting the jeweller, he tied his hands with a rope and presented him before Khalifa Harun Rashid and narrated the entire incident. Upon hearing the happening, the Khalifa asked the young jeweller to state his response. The jeweller said: "Your honour, that erudite woman has tricked me for the third time, the one who I had arrested and brought before you two months ago."

When the Khalifa looked at the young jeweller's face carefully, he recognized him and said to the owner of the house: "Sir, this man is honest. You have been deceived. He did not go to your house with the intent to steal." Saying so, he dismissed both of them, that is, the young jeweller and the owner of the house who was not easily convinced. He summoned the city magistrate immediately and expressed his extreme displeasure with him. After an episode of intense wrath, he called him indecent and asked him why he had not yet arrested the female trickster. The magistrate replied, "Protector of the World, I and the entire staff of my office have been searching for her day and night but have not been

able to find her. However, please grant me an extension of a few more days and by God's grace I will positively arrest her and earn your esteem."

Sometime after this incident, Dalla felt an urge to go on another hunt. According to her practice, she wore fancy clothes, went to the city and kept glancing at every lane and market. Coincidentally, she reached a neighbourhood which was not densely populated and saw that in the bathroom of a house a blind faqir was sitting in the niche of a wall, sewing a quilt with gold coins inside it. Dalla went near him and greeted him. The faqir replied to the greetings and asked her who she was. Dalla said in a manly voice, "I live near you and have come to find this out, hope you do not mind."

The faqir spontaneously replied, "Baba! I am a lone soul. I only need two *rotis* to fill my stomach which I procure by patrolling and begging in the city day and night. I do not need anything else." The blind faqir reiterated that he does not cause any trouble. Dalla checked the faqir's quilt in the midst of the conversation and found that it was filled with gold coins.

Then Dalla took leave of the faqir and went to her home and stated this circumstance to her daughters. She asked all three of them to accompany her the next day: "We should fool that blind man and bring him home in whichever way possible and take his gold coins." Therefore, the next morning Dalla and her daughters left their house to go meet the faqir. They went close to him and greeted him as they would, their father.

Taken aback, the faqir asked: "Who's there?" Dalla and her daughters said: "Father, please forgive our errors and come home. We made a huge mistake by aggravating you."

Surprised, the faqir got up and said, "I do not know you nor who you are and what you are blabbering. I am a celibate man and have not ever seen a woman till today. How do you proclaim me your father then?"

At this, Dalla and her daughters began clamouring and shouting. Many people gathered at the faqir's house. Dalla and her daughters acted scared. They turned towards the crowd, addressed them and said, "Look at sahib, he is furious with us and has left the entire household and family and come here. It is better that we pray to him so that he may forgive our sins and come home. He is not agreeing to anything we say."

The people explained to the faqir that one should not get so enraged with their wife and children. Whatever sins they have committed should be forgiven. Although the faqir insisted all this was untrue, that he did

not bear any relation to them, no one believed him. On the contrary, everyone unanimously proclaimed that if he did not want to go with them honourably, they would take him forcefully. When the blind faqir realised that no one was going to believe what he had to say, and that persistence was useless, he got up and told Dalla and her daughters that he was ready to go with them. Dalla profusely thanked all the people that had gathered there and held the faqir's hand and started towards her house along with her daughters.

Upon reaching the house, they washed the faqir's hands with water and prepared food for him. All three daughters and Dalla were ever present in the service of the Faqir and treated him with courteousness and hospitality in every possible way. In this manner, three days passed. On the fourth day, one of the daughters said to the faqir, "*Baba-jaan*, I have to buy some jewellery for myself. You go to the city and buy them."

The faqir replied: "Daughter, I am blind, how will I be able to make the purchase?"

"*Amma-jaan* will go with you; she will ascertain the cost of all those jewels which seem fit for us, and come show them to us. If they are to our liking, we will send their payment through *Amma-jaan*. Otherwise, we will return the jewels through her." No matter how the faqir protested, the daughter did not agree. Helplessly, he finally accepted the proposal.

Dalla got a set of clothes for the faqir and he began wearing them over his quilt. Dalla and her daughters exclaimed: "You are a strange fool, wearing a quilt to go buy jewels. Have you lost your wits! Take off this quilt and wear the exquisite outfit we have got for you."

The Faqir replied, "I will not part with this quilt at any cost. My *pir* has given this to me gratuitously. Don't touch it with your impure hands."

The daughters said, "You take off this quilt with your own hands and keep it away. We will not let anyone touch it."

The faqir had to inevitably agree to this as well. He took off the quilt very carefully so as to not make the gold coins rattle and kept it in a corner. Then he emphasized that it should not be touched on any account. After keeping the quilt, he stood up and Dalla held his hand and took him to the city. And, upon reaching the jewellery market she went into a jewellery shop. The owner of the shop looked at his exquisite outfit and thought that he belonged to the elite. He sat them down very respectfully and asked them what it is that they were looking for? Dalla pointed towards the faqir and said: "Some types of valuable jewels and pearls are

required at the gentleman's mansion. Please show us what you have."

The shopkeeper handed Dalla many jewels of fine quality and brilliant pearls and quoted each one's price. Dalla took them and said to the blind faqir, "*Hazrat*, please wait here at the shop. I'll go show these things at your mansion and come back at once. Those that will be liked at home and bought, I will bring back these pieces and the money."

The simpleton agreed: "Alright, I will wait here, you come back soon with the answer." Leaving the faqir at the shop she went home, related the entire story to her daughters and placed the jewels and pearls worth thousands of rupees before them. Then Dalla and her daughters tore open the Faqir's quilt and even the part that had the gold coins sewn into it. Getting their hands on such abundant wealth, Dalla and her daughters were quite delighted, and started passing their time in lavish luxury without any worries.

When it got late at the jeweller shop and Dalla did not return, the jeweller asked the blind faqir: "*Hazrat*, your wife hasn't come as of yet. The faqir replied, "She must be late because of some reason."

"Your house must be at a distance from here," the jeweller continued. "*Hazrat*, I go to my house to eat my lunch and it is afternoon, but your wife hasn't returned since morning...how long can we wait? It's better that I take you to your mansion."

The faqir got frightened and replied, "Baba, I do not know this cunning woman's house that I may take you there." On hearing this, it was as if the jeweller's body was suddenly on fire. He shouted, "Bastard! You tricked me and took away assets worth thousands and are now pretending to be innocent by saying that you don't even know the woman's house. As if that woman was not your wife and didn't take my jewels for your house."

The faqir said: "For God's sake I am telling the truth. Neither do I know that woman nor am I aware where her house is." Upon hearing this, the jeweller got even angrier and started mercilessly beating the helpless, blind faqir.

The faqir shouted and said, "Baba I am innocent. Don't hit me."

The jeweller did not heed him and kept beating him mercilessly. After being beaten up the faqir was in a bad state, the jeweller took him to Khalifa Harun Rashid and related the entire incident. The Khalifa enquired about the circumstance from the faqir who narrated the entire tale and said, "*Jahan-panah*, that woman also took my thousand gold

coins that I had sewn in my quilt.” Upon hearing this, the Khalifa deduced that this entire doing is of that mischievous woman. He got very angry and summoning the city magistrate he berated him harshly and proclaimed: “You are suspended till you find the whereabouts of that woman.”

After a few days, Dalla went to the market again, accompanied by a slave. She went to a cloth merchant’s shop and said to him: “I need a few yards of brocade.” The clothier displayed dozens of fine and valuable fabrics before her. Dalla selected ten pieces, handed them to the slave and told him to take them home. The slave took the clothes and left for home and Dalla sat at the shop. After a while Dalla said to the cloth merchant: “*Miyan* you are a man with a lot of courage, that without knowing me you gave me your goods worth thousands. If I walk away, what can you do with me?” Saying so, she stood up. The cloth merchant laughed and replied: “Very well. Let’s see why would you leave.”

Dalla said, “Let’s see” and walked a few steps ahead. Then she halted and smiled at the cloth merchant. The cloth merchant kept sitting and laughed at Dalla’s antics. Dalla said: “Now watch me disappear.” The clothier laughed and said, “Well, let’s see how you disappear!” Dalla went a little bit farther ahead when some buyers entered the shop and the clothier started talking to them. Dalla saw the empty space and got out and walked home briskly. When after a moment the clothier looked in Dalla’s direction she had vanished. Then, an uneasiness took hold of the clothier’s heart. He stood on top of the shop and raced his eyes all over the marketplace below. Dalla was nowhere to be seen. Scared, he walked down out of his shop barefoot and senselessly ran around the market looking for her. He could not find any sign of Dalla. Despondently, he came back to the shop, closed it for the day and went and stood respectfully before the Khalifa, telling him what he had gone through. Upon hearing his story, the Khalifa expressed remorse and got very furious with his judicial staff and then stressed for Dalla’s search.

Dalla did not step out of her house. A long time after this incident, she went on a stroll towards the market. She saw a young jeweller at a shop counting and putting gold coins in a bag. Suddenly an elegant woman passed by the shop. The jeweller handed the bag of gold coins to his slave and told him to deliver it home. Then he left the shop and followed that alluring beauty, expressing his love and yearning for her. But the woman did not turn her attention to him. The young jeweller got disappointed and went back to his shop. Meanwhile, Dalla started

following the slave carrying the bag of gold coins. She went to the jeweller's house and when he went inside, Dalla came back with a letter along the lines: "Oh, young jeweller, today when I passed by the front of your shop in the morning, I fell in love with you quite helplessly, as soon as I saw you. Despite your wanting to strike a conversation with me, I could not talk to you at that time because my father was walking behind me. Now, I am sending this letter to you through my maidservant. Come here immediately, for my house is empty and appease my troubled heart through your perfect elegance."

Upon reading this letter, the young jeweller's desires blossomed. He thought to himself "that his sad heart had come alive. "I will come with you," he said to Dalla. He locked the shop and left with her. Dalla along with him went through many lanes in the hope that she could fulfil her purpose. Finally, she saw an extravagantly built house with a well inside it. Dalla asked the young jeweller to wait outside while she went inside to inform the young woman. She saw that there were only two women inside the house, and said to them: "O respectable women, it's time for prayers. If you permit, may I call my son who is sitting outside for water and tea that he may perform ablutions.

The women agreed: "Alright, let us get veiled, you can call your son in."

Dalla went outside and said to the young jeweller: "The elegant woman's bucket has fallen inside the well. Use a stick and take it out."

He replied: "Very well," and saying so, he took off his clothes on the porch and went to the well. Dalla took his clothes and hurried to his house and told his wife that her husband was in the bath and wanted a new set of clothes, adding that he had asked for the bag of gold coins that he sent through the slave's hand this morning. The jeweller's wife, upon seeing her husband's clothes and Dalla's appearance, did not doubt anything. She immediately handed her a new set of clothes and the bag of gold coins. With these things in hand, Dalla went home.

When the young jeweller saw there was no stick with which to retrieve the bucket, he called out for Dalla. When he did not get a reply, looking towards the lobby behind the curtain he said: "Bibi, where is the stick? How can I take out the bucket from the well?" The poor women were chaste and veiled and couldn't answer him, for he was an immodest man and they got scared. As fate would have it, by chance the owner of the house reached there at that time and seeing the young, sparingly clothed jeweller standing by the well, he got deeply agitated and asked:

“Who are you? Why have you come inside a stranger’s house?”

The young jeweller replied: “An old woman brought me here saying that your bucket has fallen inside the well, and I should retrieve it with a stick. Now I cannot see that woman anywhere. Who knows where she has disappeared.”

The owner of the house went into the lobby where the women of his house were sitting and enquired what was going. They replied: “This man is lying. We did not request anyone to take our bucket out of the well nor did our bucket fall inside it. Albeit, an old woman did come to us. She said that she wanted to offer her prayers. She said that her son was sitting outside the house and asked us to permit him to come inside to perform the ablutions. We gave her permission and she sent this young man inside. Now, we don’t know what this man is asking for and how he wants to take out the bucket and where has that woman gone.”

The owner thought that the woman and her son must have come to his house with an intent to steal and entered with an excuse to fill water. So, he went to the well and got a hold of the young jeweller and started beating him. The jeweller repeated again and again: “Sir, that woman is certainly not my mother.” But he did not believe him. Consequently, when he had beaten the jeweller nice and proper, he took hold of his hand and threw him out of the house. The young jeweller, went back to his house wrapped in a loincloth. When he reached home, his wife enquired: “Why are you not wearing your clothes?”

He replied: “An old woman conned me in a most bizarre manner and took them away.”

On hearing this, the wife started shouting. And cried out, “*Haye!* That baseborn has not merely taken your clothes but has put greater devastation upon us.”

The jeweller asked: “Is everything alright, what else has happened?”

His wife related the entire incident about Dalla taking his clothes and the bag of gold coins. The young jeweller was so shocked upon hearing that the bag was gone that he fainted. When he regained consciousness, he went crying to the Khalifa and narrated the entire incident to him. Upon hearing this, the Khalifa was both, shocked and furious with his ministers of court and commanded for Dalla’s arrest and imprisonment.

After a while, Dalla went to the city intending to hunt again. While roaming around the market, the cameleer suddenly recognised and

caught her at once and said: “You baseborn, I have got my hands on you after so many days, now I am not letting go at any cost.”

Dalla said: “Brother, if you are desirous of your camel, then I have no objection in returning it to you, and if you desire to disgrace me, without any reason, then it is your choice, you may do as your temperament pleases.”

The cameleer said: “If you give me the cost of my camel, I have no gripe with you. I will be happy and you can be happy too.”

“You are very sensible. Come with me, I will give you the cost of the camel, this very instance,” replied Dalla. Saying so, she took him with her and stopped at a shop saying: “A thousand dinars of mine are kept in this bone setter’s custody. You wait here. I will just take the money from him and pay the camel’s cost.”

“Alright,” said the cameleer, and waited at some distance from the bone setter’s shop.

Dalla went to the bone setter and said, “*Ustad* I have heard many good things about you and have come to you because one of my slave’s teeth are hurting severely. In fact, due to his suffering from pain he has reached a point of insanity and is equally frightened of breaking the four teeth which are hurting. Through some technique, break four of his teeth so that that poor man may be freed from his grievous pain.” Saying this she politely gave a gold coin to the bonesetter and continued: “The slave is standing over there. But, when you try to catch hold of him and he realizes you intend to break his teeth, he will blabber insanely and try to escape. So, think about appropriate arrangements for the same beforehand.”

The bone setter told her to rest assured: “I will set him right.” Saying so, he signalled his apprentices to catch hold of him and bring him in. About a dozen apprentices immediately ran from the bone setter’s shop and got a hold of the cameleer.

However, the cameleer shouted and cried for help: “Bone setter, why are you capturing me without any cause?” No one listened to him and dragged him to the bone setter and held both of his hands. The skilful bone setter held both of his hands tightly, took out a fleam and broke four of the cameleer’s teeth. The poor cameleer fainted and fell down and bled so much from his mouth that all his clothes got covered in blood.

Dalla said to the bone setter: “I will send my servants so that they pick up this slave and take him away.” And saying this she left for her

house. When, after some time, the cameleer regained consciousness he asked the bone setter, “Where has that strumpet gone and why did you break my teeth?” The bone setter said, “You are extremely ungrateful that you are calling such a generous and compassionate master names – one who has spent a gold coin to free you from such grievous pain.”

Although the cameleer was furious with the bone setter, he was so weak, he could not say anything to him. Miserable and wounded, he went to Khalifa Harun Rashid lamenting and crying, and narrated the entire incident to him. The Khalifa was very distressed, called the Vizier and said: “I grant you one week. However possible, bring that clever woman. Otherwise, I will dismiss you.”

Escaping from the cameleer, Dalla restrained from strolling for a long time. But then, one day, she couldn't help stroll to the market. This time the washerman recognised her, tied both her hands behind her back and started beating her right there. When Dalla found herself helpless, she came up with a tactic where she threw her hands towards the sky and crying loudly, she began saying: “My Lord! Overlook the misdeeds of this son of mine whose mind has been ambushed by insanity. Instead, out of your graciousness, pardon and forgive him.”

The washerman said: “You old vixen, make up a thousand stories and more, and play whatever trick you like, I will not release you this time.” Soon, seeing this situation, countless men gathered in the market and listening to Dalla's pleas, said to the washerman: “You useless, dishonourable man, are you not ashamed of hitting your old mother so mercilessly?”

The washerman replied, “This woman is not my mother. She is a fraudulent and deceitful woman, using treacherous ways she has misappropriated the wealth and assets of thousands of men, ruined them and left them in need. I have been roaming about in search of her for a very long time. Now after thousands of problems, I have finally caught hold of her today.”

On hearing this Dalla cried out even more loudly: “My lord, now my lovely child's insanity has crossed all limits. *Haye!* Now he has even forgotten me. He publicly says I am not his mother. My Lord, have mercy on my miserable circumstances and old age and bless him with enlightenment and forgive his crimes.”

Dalla said this with such a sorrowful face and cried so innocently that all those gathered there believed her. Many men got a hold of the washerman, slapped him and separated him from Dalla. Dalla escaped

from the washerman's hands and reached her home safely and the washerman went crying to the Khalifa and narrated all that had happened. The Khalifa got extremely distressed and ordered guards all over the city. They searched for her day and night and went from door to door personally. The reward of Dalla's arrest was raised from two thousand dinars to five thousand, and a public announcement was made but Dalla did not step out of her home for many months.

As providence would have it, one day when she came out to stroll in the city, but this time just as she entered the city walls, the Khalifa's soldiers arrested her and took her to the palace. The Khalifa began shaking with fiery rage as he set eyes on Dalla. He ordered her to be put in a boat immediately and left in the sea. Hearing this, Dalla began wailing wildly. The Khalifa did not pay any heed. As a result, the soldiers took Dalla into custody, and called the sailors to inform them of the Khalifa's decision. The sailors put Dalla into the boat and started out. When the boat covered a good distance and the Khalifa's soldiers had left the shore, she said to the sailors: "Misfortunates! Do you have any idea where you are taking me?"

The sailors replied they were going to execute the Khalifa's orders. Dalla laughed and said: "Fools, a disaster has struck you. Do you even know who I am and what act you are engaging in? Maybe you are not fond of your lives." The sailors listened to this and said, "How would we know who you are and what you are saying. We have just been given orders to drown you into the sea."

Dalla said, "Idiots, I am Harun Rashid's mother. It is Harun Rashid's habit to consume alcohol and get dead drunk. Today I stopped him from getting drunk but he was senseless in intoxication and was not in a condition to understand what anyone was saying. In that unhappy moment, he ordered that I be drowned in the sea. But this was done under the influence of alcohol. God forbid Haroon Rashid's upbringing is actually not such that he would give such an order. By now he must be sober and in great grief. Whoever goes to him and gives him news of my safety will be rewarded richly. Today is the test of your fate – who will reach him first and give him news of my safety."

The sailors were taken up by Dalla's glib words. They sailed back quickly to the shore and let Dalla off the boat. Then all of them ran immediately as every one of them wanted to reach the Khalifa first so as to be handed the gifts and honours. Accordingly, a few of them soon reached the Khalifa. The Khalifa upon seeing them, was quite alarmed

and asked what had happened. All of them unanimously replied: “*Huzoor*, May God bless you with a long life. We have come to deliver the good news to you that your honourable mother is safe and alive.” Hearing this, the Khalifa was astounded: “Impotents! What are you blabbering? It has been thirty years since my mother died. What good news have you got of her being alive? It seems that you were also fooled by that treacherous woman.” Saying this he called the sailors multiple curses and had them lashed with twenty whips.

After the sailors had left, Dalla ran straight towards her home and upon reaching there, told her daughters: “Living here is not prudent anymore, because every woman and child of the city of Baghdad knows of our condition and the Khalifa is also an enemy of our lives. It is better we go to the city of Halab and listen and obey the authorities because *Allah-ta’ala* has given us a lot of wealth and assets.”

Saying so, Dalla reached the city of Halab with her daughters and got all three of them married again. She divided her wealth among them; she herself spent the rest of her life remembering Allah.

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