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From Sepoy to Subadar / Khvab-o-Khayal and Douglas Craven Phillott

Introduction

During the 1970s John Borthwick Gilchrist, convinced of the potential value of the language he called "Hindustani,"[1] campaigned hard to raise its status to that of the "classical" languages (Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit) which, until then, had been perceived by the British to be more important than the Indian "vernaculars." By 1796 he had already made a valuable contribution to its study with the publication of his dictionary and grammar. It was the opening of Fort William College in 1800 by Wellesley, however, that signaled the beginning of the colonial state's official interest in the language.

Understandably, given his pioneering work, a substantial amount has been written on Gilchrist. Much less attention has been paid to the long line of British scholars, missionaries, and military officers who published Hindustani grammars and textbooks over the next 150 years. Although such books continued to be published until 1947, British scholarly interest in Hindustani seemed to have waned by the beginning of World War I. While Gilchrist and earlier authors had aspired to producing literary works, later textbooks were generally written for a much more mundane

[1]Defining the term "Hindustani" satisfactorily is problematic but this is not the place to rehearse or debate the often contentious arguments surrounding Urdu/Hindi/Hindustani. Definitions used by the British grammar and textbook writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are inconsistent and often contradictory. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, I am using the term in its widest possible sense: to cover the language at all levels, from the literary (Persianized) *Bāgh-o-Bahar* and (Persian-free) *Prem Sagur* to the basic "language of command" of the twentieth-century military grammars.

purpose—that of passing the necessary civil service and military examinations. The last British scholar of Hindustani to produce any teaching materials of a literary nature was Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas Craven Phillott.

Phillott was born in India on 28 June 1860, the third son of Henry Rodney Phillott, a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Indian army. He was educated at Felsted School in Essex between 1874 and 1878 and in 1880 received his first army commission. He served in the Indian Army, taking part in campaigns in the Zhob Valley, Hazara and the North-West Frontier, and was awarded the General Service Medal in 1891. In 1906 he retired from the army and was appointed Secretary to the Board of Examiners Calcutta.[2] He also served as Consul in Persia for two years and from 1912 was lecturer in Hindustani at Cambridge. During the First World War he was employed as chief censor of the Prisoners of War Central Bureau in Cairo and at the Indian Base in Port Said. After the war he returned to England, living first in Maida Vale and later moving to Felsted in 1920. He continued to work for the University of Cambridge as an examiner for Urdu and Persian until shortly before his death in 1930.

Phillott was a distinguished scholar and linguist. He was proficient in Persian and Arabic producing two Persian grammars and a translation of *Nafḥat al-Yaman*, as well as a manual of Egyptian Arabic. He contributed many papers to the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, of which he was general secretary, philological secretary and twice gold medalist.[3] It is, however, for his Hindustani materials that he is best known. In a relatively short time period, while Secretary to the Board of Examiners, he produced: *Hindustani Stepping Stones* (1908), later extended and republished as the *Hindustani Manual* (1910); the quaintly, but aptly, named *Hindustani Stumbling Blocks* (1909); *The Right Word in the Right Place* (1911); *Hindustani Exercises* (1912); and *Khazīna-e Muḥāvrāt* (Urdu Idioms, 1912). For the Lower Standard Hindustani examination he produced the *Urdu Rōzmarra* and its English translation (1911). He is probably best remembered, however, for his translation, used for the Higher Standard Examination in Hindustani, of the "memoirs" of an old subedar (*ṣūbēdār*) of the Bengal Army—one Sita Ram Pandey.

The Text and Its Many Incarnations

[2]Fort William College became the Board of Examiners from 24 January 1854.

[3]Obituary notice, *The Times*, 12 September 1930.

The text that Phillott had chosen to translate for the Higher Standard had by that time already been through various incarnations. The "memoirs" of Sita Ram Pandey—perhaps better known under the title *From Sepoy to Subedar*—give an account of Sita Ram's life in the East India Company's army from 1812 to 1860. They chronicle the various campaigns in which he fought and provide insights into the workings of the Bengal Army and the changing relationship between British officers and sepoys as well as relating his many adventures along the way.

The original version was written, allegedly, in 1861 by Subedar Sita Ram Pandey himself, on his retirement from the Bengal Army, at the behest of his commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel James Thomas Norgate. According to the preface of Norgate's 1873 English edition, a copy of the original manuscript[4] was given to him by Sita Ram's son, which he translated into English. In the same preface, Norgate states that his translation was published in an (unnamed) Indian journal "now defunct" in 1863. He goes on to claim that the "translation" received a favorable review in *The Times* of 1863. Although he is able to quote a passage from this review, he does not give any clue as to the exact date of it and it has not subsequently been found.[5] The earliest extant edition of the text, therefore, is the January 1873 edition, published in Lahore, printed at the Victoria Press by Azizuddin and entitled *From Sepoy to Subadar: Being the Life and Adventures of a Native Officer of the Bengal Army. Written and related by himself.*[6]

Sir Patrick Cadell, who spent many years studying the "memoirs," suggested that this 1873 edition "must have excited some local interest" (1959, 54) as it was translated into Urdu in July of the same year by Sarishtadār Munshī Muḥammad Abdu'l-Ghaffār and, like the English edition, printed at the Victoria Press, Lahore. Cadell also mentions that there are copies in the India Office Library and in the British Museum. In the next volume of the same journal, however, he contradicts this, saying that although a translation into Urdu had apparently been made, of which one copy was sent to Lahore and another to the India Office, "neither of these copies has survived" (1960, 90). This Urdu edition is, nevertheless, listed in the Hindustani catalogue in the British Library under the title *Tavārīkh-e Yadgār-e Ṣūbadār,* so it is clear that at least one copy *did* survive.

Rather surprisingly, the translator's preface to the 1873 Urdu version

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[4]The original is usually supposed to have been written in Awadhi.

[5]Patrick Cadell, James Lunt, Walter Hakala and I are among those who have searched, unsuccessfully, for this review.

[6]Copies of this edition are held in the British Library and also in the SOAS Library Special Collections.

gives a more detailed account[7] of how the memoirs came to be written than Norgate's *own* preface. It suggests that Norgate came into contact with Sita Ram when the latter visited the cantonment regarding his pension. It was at this meeting that the old subedar first related some of his experiences. Perceiving him to be intelligent and as having had experience of the world, Norgate apparently wanted to hear more, but there was no time. Sita Ram then told him that he had written it down in a "*roznamcha*" but that this was in need of some editing (Norgate 1873b, 2). That this Urdu translation was produced at Norgate's instigation is clear from the title page which refers to him as "*mua'llif.*"[8]

In 1880, the year he retired from the army, Norgate published a reprint of the English edition,[9] as the work had "found so much favor with the public" (Phillott 1914b, xiii). Despite the apparently enthusiastic reception of Norgate's English editions, it is likely that these, and the Urdu edition (of which only four hundred copies were printed), would have sunk into obscurity had it not been for Phillott. In 1910 he came across Sita Ram's "memoirs," and "finding them of such absorbing interest and unable to trace the original[10] … determined to translate them into simple *colloquial* Urdu" (*ibid.*). His translation was initially published in the *Faujī Akhbār* newspaper.

Since the first decade of the nineteenth century Mīr Amman's *Bāgh-o-Bahār* had been the standard textbook for the Hindustani exams for army officers and civil servants. By the latter part of the century, however, there were calls to have it replaced. Writing as "Indophilus" to *The Times* in September 1858, Trevelyan recommends in no uncertain terms that: "The pedantic, puerile, licentious *Bagh-o-bahar* should be discarded as a textbook, and manuals should be compiled more closely representing the actual language of the camp and country" ([1858], 17). The Government of India Military Department had also tried, first in the 1860s and again in 1894, to remove *Bāgh-o-Bahār* from the syllabus (India. Government 1894, n.p.). Whilst conceding its "literary merits," it regarded the book as being "of the smallest interest or usefulness" and sought to replace it with "some work in thoroughly good Urdu."[11]

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[7]The account in the Urdu edition is also somewhat contradictory.

[8]*Tavārīkh-e Yādgār-e Ṣūbadār,* 1873 title page in Urdu reads "*Ḥasb-e farmā'ish ṣāḥib mu'allif*" and mentions that Norgate is now a magistrate in Sialkot.

[9]By W. Ball, Lahore.

[10]Somewhat surprisingly given his interest and scholarship in Urdu, Phillott appeared to be unaware of the existence of Munshī ʿAbdu'l-Ghaffār's Urdu translation—or if he was, he makes no reference to it anywhere.

[11]*Indian Army Circulars, Enclosure No. 1,* From Major General Sir E.H. Col-

There had long been a mismatch, therefore, between the scholarly and literary approach of the Board of Examiners, Calcutta, and the pragmatic needs of civil and military officers. In 1907 the Government of India finally decided that the existing textbooks for both Lower and Higher Standard were unsuitable for Civil officers and consulted the Board of Examiners Calcutta, as well as its counterparts in Madras and Bombay, regarding the production of new ones. Phillott participated in these initial consultations but in May 1908 returned to England on leave for sixteen months. In his absence a committee was set up to decide upon the selections for the new textbooks. By the time he returned to India at the end of October 1909 and resumed his duties, it had completed its work and the new textbooks had been approved for publication. By October 1910, however, the Government of India had decided that it was "desirable to secure uniformity in the text-books for both civil and military officers" (India. Government 1910, n.p.) and had arranged "in consultation with Colonel Phillott to adopt a text book which will be prepared by him" (*ibid.*). Quite what influence Phillott had on the Government of India's decision is unclear from the available correspondence, but it was at this point that *Sepoy to Subadar* was approved as Part I[12] of the new Higher Standard textbook entitled *Khvāb-o-Khayāl*.

As the story of a sepoy who was not only loyal during the "Mutiny" but who also apparently admired the British in many ways, *Sepoy to Subadar* was clearly "an eminently suitable text to be prescribed for the (Hindustani) examination syllabuses" (Shackle and Snell 1990, 117). Although he had already edited and annotated the Urdu text, Phillott then decided it would be helpful to candidates to republish Norgate's original English "translation." This 1911 edition, (referred to by Phillott as the 3rd edition)[13] is completely faithful to Norgate's text as Phillott thought it proper "to reproduce it without alteration or correction of any kind" except that for the benefit of candidates he had "added a few notes" and had also "recast and numbered the paragraphs so as to facilitate comparison with the Urdu" (1914b, xiii). *Khvāb-o-Khayāl* remained in use as a textbook until 1947, thus ensuring that it became widely known to civil service and military candidates, both British and Indian. A second (revised) edition of both the Urdu and English versions was published in 1914

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len, Secretary to the Government of India Military Department, to the Secretary, Board of Examiners, No. 2744b "Languages Examinations," dated Simla, 10 October 1894.

[12]Part II consists of selections from the *Rusum-i-Hind* and Part III of selections from the *Qaṣaṣ-e Hind*, *Cand Pand, Mir'at ul 'Arūs* and *Fasāna-e Āzād*.

[13]Phillott regards the 1873 and 1880 editions as the 1st and 2nd respectively.

and these were reprinted (unchanged) several times between 1921 and 1942.

In the 1940s[14] a Devanagari version was also compiled by the Board of Examiners and issued by "The General Staff in India." This edition is unusual in several ways. Not only does its translator remain anonymous, all rights having been ceded to the Crown, but it also proclaims itself to be the "Official text book for the Higher Standard Examination in Urdu (Nagari Script)."[15] In terms of content it is also different from the Urdu-script version. Although entitled *Khvāb-o-Khayāl,* it only contains Part 1 of the original text—i.e., *From Sepoy to Subadar*. Phillott's editorial notes have been used (largely unchanged) but the translator has also replaced various words and phrases from the Urdu version with words he seemed to think more appropriate for a Devanagari-script edition. Given that its title is *Urdu* (not even Hindustani, let alone Hindi) it begs the question as to the motivation behind the changes. The replacements are also rather haphazard. Some Persian/Arabic-derived words in common use are replaced, (*qiṣṣē/kahāniyāñ*) while many others words (sometimes less common) are left unchanged (*zehn nashīn*, *taʿajjub*, etc.). Yet others are changed from one Persian form to another—"*mērī paidāʾish hūʾī*" becomes "*maiñ paidā huā*" or from Arabic to Persian (*lēkin/magar*) for no apparent reason.

Although *From Sepoy to Subadar* remained part of the textbook for Higher Standard Hindustani for thirty-seven years, awareness of it was still limited mainly to army officers and civil servants in India. As Shackle and Snell have pointed out, *Khvāb-o-Khayāl*, unlike *Bāgh-o-Bahār*, failed to extend beyond its role as a prescribed text for British officers and to secure a place in Urdu prose literature. They attribute this, probably rightly, to two factors—firstly the "artificial style" of the Urdu/Hindustani created by Phillott for learners, and secondly its "outrageously loyalist sentiments" (1990, 117). When the "memoirs" eventually did reach a wider audience, it was an English-speaking, rather than an Urdu-speaking one, through the 1970 edition by Major-General James Lunt. Lunt's "freely edited" version (Mason 1974, 207) with its introductory notes to each chapter, explanatory footnotes and illustrations by Frank Wilson remains by far the best known edition, but the incarnations of the text were not yet quite complete. In 1999, journalist Madhukar Upadhyay retranslated the text into Awadhi. It

[14]It has not been possible to establish the exact date of the 1st edition. The date of the 2nd is 1942.

[15]The British use of the terms "Urdu" and "Hindustani" was always inconsistent and in the latter days of the colonial period they were commonly used synonymously.

was with this edition, therefore, that the "memoirs" finally came full circle.

The Problem of Authenticity

When Douglas Craven Phillott decided to translate the "memoirs" he could not have foreseen the debates that would later ensue over their authenticity, although questions concerning the original text did arise during his lifetime. As we have seen, Phillott himself says that he translated it since he was "unable to trace the original" and Sir George Grierson apparently also attempted, unsuccessfully, to track down the "original" version in 1915 (Lunt 1970, xvii). Interestingly, although Grierson and Phillott corresponded for many years, the question of the original text was not discussed,[16] nor did Phillott raise doubts as to its authenticity in the prefaces or editorial notes to the Urdu or English editions of the text.

Writing in 1974, Philip Mason says, "Until fairly recent times, it seems to have been taken for granted that these were the genuine memoirs of Sita Ram" (207). Since the late 1950s, however, various attempts, mostly by military historians, have been made to produce convincing arguments that the text is genuine. In the absence not only of the original manuscript, but also of Norgate's supposed 1863 edition and the review in *The Times* of the same year, such arguments ultimately tend to rely on subjective opinions and belief rather than hard evidence. Two of these are worth examining in some detail as they have frequently been cited by later writers in their own discussions of the text's authenticity.

Patrick Cadell spent over twenty years researching the military aspects of the text and in 1959 wrote a detailed article in which he attempted to defend its authenticity. Comparing the wealth of material available in the form of memoirs of *British* soldiers with the scanty amount available from the old Indian Army, he highlights the fact that the text's rarity greatly increases its value "if it can be established that it is *authentic* and *unmanipulated by any editor*" (1959, 3, italics added). Whilst he acknowledges that the story may contain some error of detail, he does not think this prevents it from being accepted as honest and genuine and argues that "against occasional inaccuracy may be put the occurrence of names and incidents which it would have been difficult for anyone to invent or to fake" (*ibid.*). He concedes, however, that Sita Ram never refers to the

[16]The only reference Phillott makes to *Khvāb-o-Khayāl* is regarding his refusal to sign over the rights of it in order to produce a romanized version as he does not approve of the proposed transliteration system. See Phillott (1928).

regiments in which he served by their numbers and that he rarely names any of the officers he served with. One officer Sita Ram does name is his first commanding officer Burumpeel, for whom he had great affection and respect. Cadell devotes considerable space to conjecture as to the identity of Burumpeel, but after much discussion about officers it was likely *not* to have been, he concludes that this Burumpeel "must therefore regretfully remain a mystery" (*ibid.*, 53).

Cadell's discussion of the "memoirs" is also littered with sentences such as, "*it is to be presumed* that Sitaram and his uncle were separated from it [their company] at an early stage of the fight" and "Sitaram *must have* continued in one of the composite battalions from different regiments of the Bengal army" (*ibid.*, 4–5, italics added). He also asserts that Sita Ram "*evidently* remained on the most friendly terms" with Lieutenant-Colonel J. T. Norgate "with whom he had many talks…"[17] but does not provide any evidence to support this (*ibid.*, 51). His desire for military accuracy also leads him to make statements which do not help his case for authenticity. He says, for example, that Sita Ram's account of the battle of Ghazni is "not quite accurate" and that his accounts of the battles of Pherushahr and Chillianwala read like those of an eyewitness, despite the fact that it was impossible for his regiment to have taken part in them (*ibid.*).

Having thus given numerous examples of vagueness and inaccuracy in the text, Cadell subsequently arrives at a completely illogical conclusion: "That the story is absolutely genuine, and Sitaram's own, cannot I think, be doubted" (*ibid.*, 52). His reasoning for this is again based not on evidence, but on his opinion that the "little hits at the Muhammedans and Panjabis, the occasional criticisms, shrewd but friendly, of his officers, the references to Hindu customs, would have required the pen of a Kipling or a Morier to invent, and *there is no reason to believe* that Norgate possessed this" (*ibid.*, italics added).

In a final attempt to convince the reader, Cadell describes George Grierson's encounter with Girja Shankar Bajpai, whose translation for the Higher Standard Hindustani examination referred to a version of the text (supposedly Sita Ram's original) he had read as a boy (*ibid.*). Despite Bajpai's claims that the text was still in his father's possession, subsequent enquiries in 1915 failed to trace it and his father denied any knowledge of it.[18] Cadell claims that "no opportunity occurred of asking Sir Girja

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[17]Norgate was second in command of the 12th Punjab Infantry, the final regiment with which Sita Ram supposedly served.

[18]James Lunt made similar enquiries of the Bajpai family, and G.S. Bajpai's

Shankar Bajpai about his recollections before his death" (*ibid.*, 55), a rather odd statement given that there was a period of nearly forty years, until his death in 1954, in which it would have been possible to do so. Undeterred by the complete lack of supporting evidence, Cadell then arrives at another set of completely illogical conclusions:

> It seems *certain*, however, that Sitaram was known to the Bajpai family, and that a Hindi version of the Memoir of Sitaram's life was in its possession. If so, it *seems probable* that it was the original manuscript or a copy made directly from it. [...] There we must leave the old subadar with *the certainty* that he existed, and *did write* his recollections.
>
> (*ibid.*, 56, italics added)

In his discussion of the text, Philip Mason initially appears to cast doubts on the authenticity of the memoirs. "The original manuscript is said to have been written in Hindi, in the Oudh dialect, and finished in 1861. Norgate says that he translated this document into English, with Indian help,[19] and first published it in "an Indian periodical since defunct"—but this first publication has not been traced, nor has the original manuscript" (1974, 207). Alluding to Meadows Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug* (1839),[20] he then speculates as to whether Sita Ram could be the unacknowledged product of many talks with Indian officers linked only by Norgate's imagination (*ibid.*, 208). He acknowledges that the many inaccuracies regarding dates and names, Sita Ram's many changes of regiment, the fact that his views on the whole *are those a British officer would expect him to hold*, and that the whole thing is "too good to be true" (*ibid.*, italics added) all add to the case against its authenticity. He even raises the possibility of the text being Norgate's creation, "written not out of a desire to perpetrate a deliberate fraud on his readers, or to convince them of any special gospel but with the general purpose of increasing understanding between officers and men" (*ibid.*).[21]

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son, in a letter of 1968, also denied any knowledge of such a manuscript (1970, xvii).

[19]There is no reference to this "Indian help" by Norgate himself in his prefaces to either the 1st or 2nd edition so it is not clear where Mason obtained this information. This is quite an important point to bear in mind when it comes to the discussion of language issues below.

[20]Taylor never claimed this was anything other than a novel, based however, on his own experience in tracking down thugs. It was so well known that Norgate could not have been unaware of its existence.

[21]I would agree with this statement. Whether or not the text is genuine, Norgate's motivation for publishing it, as stated in his preface, remains the same.

At this point, however, Mason changes his tune. He describes Sita Ram's frequent inability to remember the number of a sepoy regiment and getting the commanding officers of regiments wrong as "slight lapses of memory" which in his opinion are arguments actually *in favor* of authenticity (*ibid.*, 209). Drawing attention to the fact that Norgate sometimes inserts translator's footnotes pinpointing such inaccuracies, he then says: "It could of course be argued that Norgate inserted inaccuracies and mysteries to add an air of verisimilitude. This I find no more convincing than the argument of Victorian opponents of evolution, that the Almighty created the world in seven days but put in the fossils to make it *look* older" (*ibid.*).

Having not produced any concrete evidence that the text is genuine, Mason now begins to sound much like Cadell. He sees Sita Ram's tendency to ramble and digress as "realistic" and argues that if Norgate really was the author, not only was he something of a literary genius, he also would not have found it easy to conceal the truth because "Everyone in India knew everyone else." He decides that there is a "strong balance of probability that Norgate did persuade Sita Ram to write down what he remembered …" and asserts that he regards Sita Ram (in general) as a "credible witness" (*ibid.*, 210). Despite this, his next statement suggests that he has not entirely succeeded in convincing himself: "At the very worst, if, as I think unlikely, he never existed, he does at least represent what almost all British officers *thought* was the way sepoys felt" (*ibid.*, italics added).

The most glaring flaw in Mason's argument, however, comes when he cites a passage from the text regarding the changed relationship between white soldiers and sepoys. He quotes Sita Ram as saying: "I was always very good friends with the English soldiers and they used to treat the sepoy with great kindness. And why not?* Did we not do all their work?" (*ibid.*, 211). Mason's footnote reads: "*This is a very common expression in Hindi and Urdu. Not that that proves anything." I assume he means: "*Aur kyoñ nahīñ?*"

Despite admitting that the use of the expression *proves* nothing, Mason has nevertheless deliberately cited it as lending weight to the case for authenticity. There is, however, a supreme irony in his admission because the phrase is not in Norgate's *original* at all, nor is it in any of Phillott's annotated English editions. It has, in fact, been inserted by Lunt in 1970, in what Mason himself described as a "freely edited text"! Although in itself this may not appear to be of great importance, it becomes so when viewed as an example of the carelessness which so often accompanies the discussions and use of this text even by serious historians. It is

also significant because of the tendency of subsequent writers to use Lunt's edition rather than the Norgate original as a source, and to cite Mason himself as some kind of "proof" that Sita Ram can be regarded as "a credible witness."

Other discussions concerning the authenticity of the text often rely heavily on Cadell and Mason for their arguments. Lunt, in his editorial note, acknowledges that doubts cast on the "memoirs" will remain until more positive proof of their authorship can be established (1970, xvii–xviii). He cites Cadell's conclusion that the memoirs were genuine as part of his own argument for authenticity. Having advanced absolutely no evidence for this, he then echoes Mason in stating that: "It is partly on account of Sita Ram's haziness about names and dates that his story *rings true* for me" (*ibid.*, xviii, italics added). He then makes the statement, which he has no way of substantiating and which conflicts with the introduction to the 1873 Urdu translation, that Sita Ram "certainly could not have kept a diary from which to refresh his memory" (*ibid.*). Lunt's final word on the authenticity of the memoirs is somewhat ambiguous however: "… the longer I have studied them … the more convinced I have become that *in essence* they are true" *(ibid.*, italics added).

More recent writers use similarly subjective arguments for believing the memoirs are genuine. Dalrymple suggests that "it may have been written by a Briton under a pseudonym or as the ghostwriter of a sepoy. My personal *suspicion* is that it is the latter*, for the tone reads true to my ears*" and it is *difficult to believe* it is an outright forgery, especially when compared with the sepoy's letter from the DG [*Delhi Gazette*], 8 May 1855 … which is clearly a fake" (2006, 515, n48, italics added). His grounds for believing this are that the article is full of British assumptions, usages and stereotypes about Indians and therefore cannot have been written by a sepoy (*ibid.*, n49). As I will argue later, *From Sepoy to Subadar* is equally filled with such "British assumptions, usages and stereotypes" and as the excerpts below will show, the beginning of the *Delhi Gazette* article is remarkable for the similarity of the "old sepoy's" account of his life to that of Sita Ram Pandey.

Delhi Gazette Extract

> Sir, I am an old Sepoy officer just invalided and settled in my village for the remainder of my days. Ram be praised. For 52 years I have eaten the company's salt and served it faithfully I trust. A Sirdar Bahadoorship and three medals are rewards of which I am proud. Four wounds are honors which I bear upon my body. It is neither here nor there that for thirteen years I have felt and declared myself too weak and too old for active service. […]

> My father was a zameendar and with him and a sister I left my wife and child: —my uncle too is a Sirdar in the Madras army.
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> (Sing 1855, 435)

From Sepoy to Subadar Extracts

> I now send your lordship … the papers containing all I can remember of my life during the forty-eight years I have been in the service of the English Nation in which I have eaten [sic] seven severe wounds, and received six medals, which I am proud to wear.
>
> (1914b, 15)

> … My father was a Zamindar, by name Gungadeen Pandy … My mother had a brother, by name Hunoman, who was in the service of the Company Bahadoor….
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> (*ibid.*, 1)

> … What could I now do at the head of my Company? How could I double, or do *laight infantree*? … I was brought before the Invaliding Committee … which I passed; and I acquired the pension of a Soobadar, and if my rights had been considered it would have been much better that I should have received it years before.
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> (*ibid.*, 118)

Dalrymple suggests William Tytler as "a prime candidate" for having written the *Delhi Gazette* article and I would certainly concur with him that it is most likely written by a British officer. Norgate, however, had been in India since about 1843, and at the risk of sounding like Cadell and Mason, it is "highly likely" that he would have read it and been influenced by it. It is even tempting to speculate that it could have been his first attempt at the "memoirs"!

Saul David, too, turns to Lunt to lend support to his view that the text is genuine. In a footnote to his Ph.D. thesis he quotes Lunt and adds, "I too am convinced that only a genuine Bengal sepoy could have supplied the rich and (mostly) accurate detail that the memoir contains" (2001, 23). Elsewhere he writes: "I suspect it's impossible to ever verify beyond question the authenticity of 'From Sepoy to Subedar,' but in my opinion it is authentic." He bases this on his opinion that Sita Ram "knows far too much about the inner workings of the Bengal Army, and the thoughts and prejudices of the sepoys, for it *not* to be."[22] Although not in the league of the leaps of faith made by Cadell and Mason, this is, nevertheless, again a subjective judgment and provides no specific examples of evidence to support the claim of authenticity.

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[22]Email to the author, 6 August 2009, emphasis added.

Problems of Content and Attitudes

The events of 1857–1859 induced a flood of Victorian "mutiny" novels and by the time Norgate's "translation" of 1873 was published a number of these had already appeared. That Norgate was familiar with the work of at least one of these novelists is clear from this reference in his preface: "[T]here are incidents enough, had one the pen of a 'Grant,'[23] to have produced a most romantic tale…" (Phillott 1911b, xi). Other precedents also existed for books written by British authors as if they were written by "natives." Philip Meadows Taylor, mentioned earlier, based on his first-hand knowledge of the *thuggee* campaigns, wrote from the point of view of a thug, whilst "Panchkouree Khan" made use of the fictitious agency of "an Orderly" to relate his own experience and opinions.[24] It could easily be argued that Norgate as a serving officer in the Indian Army would have felt freer, posing as an Indian, to express certain criticisms of the Army and its officers, while ostensibly distancing himself from some of the views expressed as he does in his preface and in certain footnotes.[25]

In terms of the content of the text, the number and type of adventures Sita Ram has are simply "too good to be true" (Mason 1974, 208). He rescues a beautiful girl who is about to be killed and lives with her happily ever after; he escapes from Afghanistan in disguise; in the Mutiny he commands a firing-party which was ordered to execute his own son; he is in every important war of the half-century except the Burmese (*ibid.*). He also appears to have more lives than the proverbial cat. Mason omits to mention his numerous lucky escapes from death, either in battle, or at the hands of thugs, Pindaris and mutineers.

If the actual content stretches the boundaries of belief, the "missing content" is possibly more revealing. The text, as already noted, has been associated frequently with the "Mutiny" and yet it is curiously reticent about this. By coincidence, Sita Ram is on furlough when his regiment mutinies. He has one of his lucky escapes from death when the rebel sepoys, who were about to shoot him on the spot, decide instead to take him to Lucknow and he is then, extremely fortuitously, rescued by British officers (Phillott 1914b, 112–15). Setting aside the improbability of these events, we learn very little about the Mutiny except that he was present at the relief of Lucknow (*ibid.*, 17) and was in "not a few fights" (*ibid.*, 115).

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[23]James Grant, 1822–1887: Scottish novelist and historian. Author of *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny* (London; New York: Routledge, 1868).

[24]Preface to his *Revelations of an Orderly* (London: James Madden, 1849), n.p.

[25]In his preface he states: "For the opinions contained in the work I am not responsible: they are those of a Hindoo, not a Christian." See Phillott (1914b, xi).

Even when his own son is captured and executed we are only told that this took place in "one of the enclosed buildings near Lucknow" (*ibid.*, 116). One possible reason for this reticence is that, unlike other events in the text, the Mutiny was so well-documented that it would have been virtually impossible to successfully fake a detailed account. Sita Ram also makes no mention at all of the post-Mutiny British reprisals, either to condemn or condone them. Many British officials and officers were highly critical of the disproportionate response. Even Majendie, whose portrayal of Indians is hardly sympathetic, expresses concern at the way in which the British took revenge.

> At the time of the capture of Lucknow … the unfortunate who fell into the hands of our troops was made short work of—Sepoy or Oude villager, it mattered not—no questions were asked; his skin was black, and did not that suffice?
>
> (1859, 156)

Concern for his pension might well have prevented Sita Ram from expressing such critical sentiments, but it is somewhat surprising, given his earlier puzzled and disapproving comments about British clemency towards their enemies[26] that he does not give some cautious approval to the "shock and awe" tactics of the British in suppressing the uprisings.

If the content of the text raises questions about the probability and accuracy of the events described, the attitudes expressed raise further doubts as to its authenticity. As Hakala observes,

> Norgate makes much capital … from the combination of the narrative's inelegance of language and *superfluity of cultural prejudice*.
>
> […] He confirms the reader's received knowledge that the Indian possesses an underdeveloped or complete lack of historical consciousness through a portrayal of Sita Ram's poor technique of memory and emplotment …."
>
> (2005, 7, italics added)

In his preface Norgate underlines this supposed inability of Indians to write history "properly" stating, "[W]hen it is remembered that 'This Life' embraces scenes and events which occurred during a period of half a century, and are related by a *native,* these errors are not surprising" (Phillott 1914b, xi, italics added).[27]

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[26]"I could never understand the sahibs quite; I have seen them spare the lives of their foes when wounded … if your enemy is not worth killing he is not worth fighting with" (Phillott 1914b, 21).

[27]In his edition, Lunt changes the word "native" to "old man" thereby com-

The text also often reads as though it is written from a British, rather than Indian, perspective. The description of the attack on Sita Ram's party by thugs is a case in point. *Thuggee* was certainly known to the British by then, as in 1810 the disappearance of many men of the Army, proceeding to and from their homes, prompted the commander-in-chief to issue an order warning the soldiers against thugs. The use of the "silken cord" and the strangulation of a man while sleeping,[28] are inaccurate, however, and the dramatic description of the attack, including the unknown language spoken by the thugs, is more reminiscent of later colonial imaginings. There are many other instances in the text where it is possible to see British orientalist and essentialist attitudes behind the views ostensibly being expressed by Sita Ram, as the examples below illustrate:

> I have said that the people of India worship power; they also love splendour, and display of wealth. Great impression is made upon the mass by this; much greater than the English seem to think.
>
> (Phillott 1914b, 55)

> We do not understand divided power; absolute power is what we worship.
>
> (*ibid.*)

> I know the Sahebs, and that nothing pleases them so much as a straight answer to a plain question, but the kala admi (native of India) does not know this generally and his endeavour is always to give an answer to a question such as shall please the asker,—exactly the one he thinks he is wished to give.
>
> (*ibid.*, 120)

> A wonderful thing is, they do not get in confusion when their leader is killed—another officer takes his place, and the men obey him just the same. Now in a Native army, if the Sirdar or leader is killed the whole army falls into confusion, and generally takes to flight—the men will not follow the next leader.…"
>
> (*ibid.*, 24)

> "[T]hey [the sepoys] liked the sahib who always treated them as if they were his own children."
>
> (*ibid.*, 16)

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pletely removing this cultural prejudice (1970, xiii).

[28]According to Dash the *rumal* was the favored method of strangulation in the first third of the nineteenth century and "the one thing they invariably avoided was strangling a sleeping man" as this was difficult to do when someone's head was resting on the ground (2005, 75).

Problems of Language

It is, however, various linguistic issues which, in my opinion, are most problematic and which cast the greatest doubt on the text's authenticity. Sita Ram is quite vague as to the language(s) he speaks, referring for the most part simply to "our language" or "my language." He mentions "Hindee" on just two occasions and Hindustani only once. Cadell raises the question as to whether "Sita Ram wrote his life in Hindustani (Urdu) or in his home language, Hindi" (1959, 54). Whatever the answer to this, Norgate's text contains a liberal sprinkling of Hindustani words throughout. It is this use of Hindustani, Hakala argues, that gives the text its linguistic claim to authenticity (2005, 7). He contends that it is "the strategic use of a limited Anglo-Indian lexicon, that most convinces the reader of Norgate's identity not as the fabricator of this narrative but merely its 'translator'" (*ibid.*). He then draws an interesting analogy between this use of Hindustani and "the effort to which a stage director will go 'to get the costumes right' in order to convince the viewer to accept historical inaccuracies in the plot of a play" (*ibid.*).

In the preface to the text Norgate states: "I have often been obliged to give the general meanings, rather than adhere to a literal translation of many sentences and ideas, the true idiom of which it is almost impossible to transpose into English" (Phillott 1914b xiii). Interestingly he *does*, on several occasions, give completely unnecessary literal translations such as, "I have eaten seven wounds" (*ibid.*, xv)[29] and "he was not alone when he mutinied" (*ibid.*, 117). He continues, "For the benefit of those who may wish to criticize the translation, where any idiomatic words are used, the *original* are often given…" (*ibid.*, xi, italics added) As Hakala rightly points out, however, most of the words were already part of the Anglo-Indian lexicon so the reader is only invited to criticize words which Norgate need not have translated at all (2005, 6).

Two linguistic areas which have not been examined and which, to my mind, offer a new perspective on the text's authenticity are: 1) the use of certain Hindustani expressions and 2) the orthography of certain transliterated Hindustani words. It can certainly be argued that having served in the Bengal Army for many years, a Hindu sepoy, no matter what his home language, would have picked up and used many Hindustani expressions, including common words of Arabic and Persian origin. Some of the expressions used by Sita Ram, however, are most unusual in terms

[29]The normal translation for "*zakhm kẖānā*" is "to be wounded" so Norgate appears somewhat disingenuous here.

of the cultural context in which he uses them. Talking of his ritual purification after being defiled he says, "I was declared *pāk* (clean) again" (Phillott 1914b, 35). This use of the Persian *pāk* by a Brahmin when talking about a Hindu religious ceremony is distinctly questionable.[30] Similarly, he uses *tabeez* (from the Arabic *taʿvīz*) for religious charm (*ibid.*, 5), whereas the 1999 Awadhi translation (Upadhyay 1999, 17) uses *jantri* and the 1942 Board of Examiners' Devanagari version uses *ganḍa* (5), both Sanskrit-derived Hindi words. Even more difficult to explain is the use of the expression *nikahana* for "marriage fees." *Nikāḥ*, according to one Hindi dictionary, is a "marriage ceremony performed according to Mohammedan rites and customs."[31] Although Phillott makes no editorial comment on this in the English text, in his Urdu translation he uses *dachina,* (meaning fees payable to Brahmins for spiritual services) (1914a, 66) and the Board's 1942 Devanagari version uses *dakshina* (47), which comes from the same Sanskrit root.

Another expression used by Sita Ram is even more extraordinary. Referring to an encounter with a Pindari, he says: "I covered him with my musket, but *tauba! Tauba!* (alas! Alas!) the flint had been knocked out …" (Phillott 1914b, 26). The use of the Arabic *tauba* (repentance) here obviously also struck a wrong note with Phillott, as this time he does put in an editorial comment, observing: "This is an unusual expression for a Brahmin of Oudh. He *ought* to have said Ram! Ram!" (*ibid.*, italics added). Given that Phillott at no point *overtly* questions the text's authenticity, this comment, with its implication that Sita Ram "got it wrong" is highly significant.[32] Later in the text, in a passage remarkable for its vitriolic attack on Muslims, Sita Ram says: "Before their accursed coming, crime was rare, but *thoba! thoba!* (alas! alas!) they have corrupted all alike now" (Phillott 1911b, 120).[33] For him to use such a quintessentially Muslim expression in the same sentence where he is attacking Muslims stretches credulity to the breaking point. It would, however, support the theory that the text was written by a British officer who simply sprinkled the text randomly with Hindustani phrases, either unaware or careless of their etymology and

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[30]Neither Phillott's Urdu version nor the Devanagari version uses *pāk,* both say instead: "*Unhōñ nē muḻ ko zat mēñ liyā*" (1914b, 68; India. Board 1942, 48).

[31]*Bhargava's Standard Illustrated Dictionary of the Hindi Language* (Benaras: Narenda Bhargava, 1946).

[32]Despite his comment Phillott retains "*tauba*" in his Urdu version. It is not, however in the Devanagari version which merely says: "*lekin na chala*" (India. Board 1942, 35).

[33]This is one of the passages omitted in the 1914 and subsequent editions. Note the inconsistent and incorrect spelling.

cultural appropriateness.[34]

For me the most compelling evidence in terms of language, however, is the constant misuse, throughout the text, of aspirated consonants. One of the things that many Britons could not get right in speaking Hindustani /Urdu/Hindi was the difference between aspirates and non-aspirates.[35] Textbooks written for British officers learning Hindustani highlight this problem. Writing in 1889 John Tweedie says: "Many words and syllables begin with a consonant followed by 'h'. This 'h' must not be ignored, as it nearly always is by Europeans. By ignoring it, you may call in a 'loafer' when you merely want your 'horse' or a native woman instead of your brother" (2). He then goes on to suggest how learners might develop their abilities to pronounce this sound but warns: "Any plan is preferable to leaving out the 'h'" (*ibid.*). Thomas Grahame Bailey also lists the five aspirated voiced plosives, *gẖ, jẖ, dẖ, ḍẖ, bẖ* as being "amongst the principal difficulties for foreign learners" (1950, xiv). Norgate's "translation" would suggest that he was one of the "foreign learners" who had a major problem with this as the following examples will show.

Norgate: Correct Transliteration and Hindi equivalent letters:

Babies[36]	bẖāī	ब = b but भ = bẖ
Sook	sukẖ	क = k but ख = kẖ
stridun	strīdẖan	ढ = d but ध = dẖ
booriya	būṛẖiā	ड़ = ṛ but ढ़ = ṛẖ
guntas	gẖanṭā	ग = g but घ = gẖ
Grunt	Granṭẖ	त = t but थ = tẖ

Norgate also not only misses out aspirates when they *should* be there—he puts them in when they should *not* be—for example, *musth* instead of *mast*. In the name *Tiluckdaree Gheer* and in the word *Bughwan*[37] he surpasses himself, managing to do both at the same time!

(तलिक) धारी गीर = (Tilak) Dẖārī Gīr	बघवान = Bughwan
(तलिक) ढारी घीर = (Tiluck) Daree Gẖeer	भगवान = Bhagwan

[34]Norgate's apparent ignorance of cultural differences is exemplified when he footnotes "Rustoom" as "the Hindoo personification of bravery" (Phillott 1914b, 10). Phillott corrects this in an editorial note.

[35]Certain words which have become part of the Anglo-English lexicon exemplify this, for example: "gharry" (*gāṛī*) and "batta" (*bẖaṭṭā*).

[36]The use of the English plural "s" on this word and on "guntas" is also a British anomaly.

[37]Given that this is the word for *God*, this is particularly strange.

These are only a few examples, but Norgate manages to get almost every single aspirate in the text wrong.[38] Since this is not an error a native speaker would ever make, such mistakes could not have come from Sita Ram's original version. Whether the memoirs were written in Awadhi or Hindustani, the Devanagari script makes it impossible even for a non-native speaker to get the aspirates wrong, as each one is represented by a single letter. If, which is less likely, it was written in the Urdu script, the letter "he" for the aspirate would also have been clearly visible. It cannot be argued either that Norgate changed Awadhi words into Hindustani and misspelled them when doing so, because he himself says: "where idiomatic words are used the original are often given," (Phillott 1914b, xi) clearly indicating that these words were in the *original* text—if it existed. How then, if he had such a text in front of him when translating, could he consistently have made such basic errors? If, however, like many British when writing Hindustani in Roman script, Norgate, as the *author* of the text, was approximating words that he had heard spoken, but pronounced *wrongly* himself, this would explain his mistakes. This may be a very small piece of evidence but it is at least a little more than the mere conjecture of some of the arguments outlined above in favor of the text's authenticity.

The Riddle of the Omitted Passages

As an official text for both army officers and civil servants, *From Sepoy to Subadar* had the sanction of the Government of India and of the Military and it is easy to see why it was regarded as a good choice. It provided a potted history of the Indian Army from the point of view (supposedly) of a sepoy, it gave "an insight into native modes of thought" (Norgate in Phillott 1914b, xi) and its "old soldier loyalist tone ensured an enthusiastic response from the Anglo-Indian press" (Shackle and Snell 1990, 117).

In the preface to the 2nd Urdu edition of 1914 Phillott notes that it "has been carefully revised. Some passages of Part 1 have been omitted" (1914a, iii). In the same year, he published what he referred to as the 4th edition of Norgate's English "translation." In the preface to it he says,

> This edition differs from preceding editions in that some paragraphs and portions of paragraphs have been omitted. The original numbering, however, has been retained: the numbers are therefore sometimes not

[38]In his English editions, Phillott puts in editorial footnotes correcting all of these but does not comment.

consecutive.

(1914b, xiv)

He gives absolutely no indication, however, as to *why* these passages should have been removed. The omissions fall into two main categories: firstly, politically incorrect observations about Muslims (and to a lesser extent Sikhs); and secondly, comments which cast doubt on the supposed invincibility of the British. The other editions (Norgate 1873a; Lunt 1970; Upadhyay 1999) all include most of the passages which Phillott omits in 1914. Strangely, however, they too omit paragraphs 316 and 317 of the final chapter. It is worth looking, therefore, at the content of these.

Paragraph 316

Let it remember the words of an old man who knows them: never trust the Mussulmans; they are the instigators and principal movers in all disturbances, always having an ill-feeling against the Sirkar. The Mussalman is the snake that the man put in his bed to keep warm, and in return it stung him; the snake's nature is to sting, therefore, obeying its nature, it stung. The religion of the Mussulman enforces on him the necessity of slaying what he calls an infidel, and promises him seven heavens seven times over for every one he slays.* With whatever pretences they may come forward, however earnestly they may assert they are faithful, and well-wishers of the English Raj, let the Saheb log never trust them, never believe them; they may have confidence placed in them, they may be treated with kindness, but never let it be supposed they can be real friends or well-wishers. They are puffed up with vain pride of the glorious days of their former emperors, and ever hope such may come again. As well might they expect the Krityog to return.

*(Phillott puts in an editorial note here saying: "This is, of course, only Sita Ram's idea.")

(Phillott 1911b, 124–25)

Paragraph 317

Their priests keep up the feeling of hatred, and are always telling them some Mehndee (prophet) is coming who will restore their sway; but he never comes. Our wise men have told me that truth was spoken in Hindoostan before the Mussulman came and overran it; and whatever bad vices are now prevalent, were all introduced by them. Before their accursed coming, crime was rare, but thoba! thoba! (alas! alas!) they have corrupted all alike now.

(*ibid.*, 125)

Whilst the intended readership of the 1873 Urdu edition may not have been exclusively Muslim, it is perhaps understandable that the translator

removed passages which he thought might have been regarded as offensive. He makes no reference in the introduction, or anywhere else in the text, however, to the fact that he has done so. Madhukar Upadhyay, likewise, gives no explanation for the omissions from the Awadhi version. Had he used Lunt's edition as a basis for his translation, it would make sense that these paragraphs are missing, but according to his preface, he used Norgate's original version (1999, 9).[39] James Lunt offers a somewhat peculiar partial explanation for his omission of the paragraphs: "He [Sita Ram] also included some allegations against the Mahommedans but these I have omitted. India is *now* a secular state[40] and there is nothing to be gained by reviving old quarrels that do no good to either side" (1970, 171, italics added).

In 1911 there were already good reasons for omitting passages offensive to Muslims. The year 1900 had seen the introduction of the Nagari Resolution in the North-Western Provinces by Sir Anthony MacDonnell, undermining the position of Urdu, and thereby of Muslims, with regard to employment. The period between 1900 and 1909 has been termed "the high point of Muslim separatism" (Robinson 1974, 133). In 1906, the Muslim League had been founded and between 1907 and 1909 provincial Muslim Leagues were established in all the major provinces. In 1909 the Morley Minto reforms were introduced which included the important concession of separate electorates for Muslims, a move that became the cornerstone of Muslim politics up to independence. The British saw Muslims as an important group which had to be kept satisfied and did not want to lose the support of "the ally whose hostility it most feared" (*ibid.*). It is perhaps surprising, therefore, that neither Phillott nor the Government of India initially deemed it necessary to remove them. By 1912 however the text had been "subjected to very strong criticism by a section of the Muhammad community[41] as containing several passages (32, 142, 185 and 316) which were considered as highly offensive to Muhammadans" (India. Government. 1913, n.p.). The Government of India "after giving the matter their careful consideration" (*ibid.*) decided that a revised edition of the book should be brought out but, unable to discard all the existing textbooks immediately, their interim solution was to paste over the objectionable passages in all unsold copies. Apparently this action "satisfied Musalman feeling" (*ibid.*) but the Government of India were obviously

[39]I have tried to contact Madhukar Upadhyay by email to ask about this but have not had any success.

[40]I am not sure what he thought it was previously!

[41]This "section of the Muhammadan" community included the Raja of Mahmudabad.

determined to be safe rather than sorry. When Phillott revised the book, in addition to the four passages mentioned above, another *fifteen* were either wholly or partially removed.

Conclusions

Michel Foucault ends his essay "What is an Author" with the question, "What matter who's speaking?" (1977, 138). This is a question at the center of the debate around the authenticity of *From Sepoy to Subadar*. How and why does it matter who wrote it? The answer lies in the fact that it changes our interpretation of the text. Neither Norgate nor Phillott can have envisaged the fascination that the text would subsequently exert, nor that it would be used as a (supposedly reliable) *source* of historical evidence. It is this use which renders the question of the text's authenticity so important.

Just as others cannot offer conclusive proof that "Sita Ram's memoirs" are genuine, neither can I prove *conclusively* that they are not. In drawing together previous arguments, however, I have demonstrated that those who wish the text to be authentic, resort to leaps of faith, and subjective opinions, because they simply cannot advance sufficient evidence on which to base systematic arguments. The lack, not only of the original manuscript, but also the two key pieces of evidence that would support the case for authenticity is, in itself, suspicious. In my close reading of the text, I have attempted to examine the issue from a different perspective. In so doing I have, hopefully, moved beyond conjecture and speculation, and provided, if not irrefutable evidence that it is Norgate's work, at least something better than the "*it seems*" or "*it is probable*" of those who "*believe*" that it is genuine. The truth about the text may never be known, but it is clear that sufficient doubts exist to prevent it from being regarded as a reliable historical source. Despite this, the "memoirs" are, as Phillott rightly said, of "absorbing interest" and provide us with a useful *reflection* of the events and attitudes of the period they describe. ❑

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