



Journal of
**Conflict
Transformation
and
Security**

Vol. 10 | No. 1 | 2023

ISSN: 2045-1903

Biannual, peer-reviewed. Published by CESRAN International

Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security



Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

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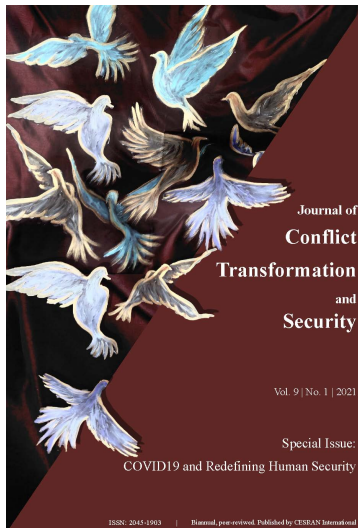
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* The surnames are listed in alphabetical order.

INDEXING & ABSTRACTING



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The Journal of Conflict Transformation and Security (JCTS) provides a platform to analyse conflict transformation and security as processes for managing change in non-violent ways to produce equitable outcomes for all parties that are sustainable. A wide range of human security concerns can be tackled by both hard and soft measures, therefore the Journal's scope not only covers such security sector reform issues as restructuring security apparatus, reintegration of ex-combatants, clearance of explosive remnants of war and cross-border management, but also the protection of human rights, justice, rule of law and governance. JCTS explores the view that by addressing conflict transformation and security holistically it is possible to achieve a high level of stability and human security, requiring interventions at both policy and practitioner level. These would include conflict management, negotiated peace agreements, peacekeeping, physical reconstruction, economic recovery, psycho-social support, rebuilding of primary services such as education and health, and enabling social cohesion. Other macro-level governance issues from constitution writing to state accountability and human resource management also need to be considered as part of this process of change.

Peer-reviewed | Academic journal

By **CESRAN International** (Centre for Strategic Research and Analysis)

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INTERVIEW

Interview with Omer Sabore and Hamid Parafshan

By Mujib Abid

The past four decades of protracted armed conflict in Afghanistan have resulted in numerous waves of population displacement, the most recent of which began in August 2021, when the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan collapsed, and the Taliban returned to power. Today, there is a large Afghan diaspora that represents a vibrant, politically diverse and intellectually activist culture, supported by a growing body of indigenous scholarship that is not necessarily part of the 'mainstream' of host countries. Rather, the Afghan diaspora tends to follow the path of a longer, traditional Afghan epistemology – or more appropriately, given the esoteric influences of their scholarship, an Afghan gnoseology.

To explore the depth, internal dynamics, and esoteric dimensions of these scholarly traditions, I interviewed two Afghan writers in Australia: Hamid Parafshan and Omer Sabore. In our conversations, a number of overlapping and complex dynamics emerge. In their work, both writers draw on Sufist Islam as a guiding compass for their politics and worldview. At the same time, despite this investment in a spiritualist sensibility, both writers respond through poetic writing, to the political imperatives of their adopted countries. To give a taste of their original writing and to demonstrate the immense decolonial potential of this emerging, marginal, fragmentary writing culture, each interview is followed by a poem selected by the writers themselves and translated by the author in collaboration with them.

Hamid Parafshan is Melbourne-based Afghan-Australian poet and writer. He is a celebrated figure in the Afghan community of Melbourne, widely recognised for his contributions to the cultural and literary scene of that city. With traditional schooling and a background in civil engineering and aviation, Hamid enjoyed a long and fruitful career as a civilian pilot in Afghanistan. Since migrating to Australia in the mid-1990s, he has self-published four books of poetry, all in Dari – his native language. His work follows the Hindustani Classical style, reflective of both these esoteric influences and Afghanistan's political upheavals.

*Omer Sabore is a Brisbane-based Afghan-Australian short story writer, poet and community organiser. Omar is a founding member of the Afghan Australian Arts, Literature & Publishing Association of Victoria Inc and from 2010 to 2017, he served as the editor of the monthly Nawaie Farhang [Voice of Culture]. He is a board member of the Afghan Queensland Community Association. Omar has self-published *Ishq o Ihsas*, a collection of poetry and short stories. He is working on completing his second manuscript of shorts and poetry.*

Interview with Omer Sabore

Mujib: Can you please introduce yourself and tell us about your literary journey?

Omer: I am from the Koti Sangi area of Kabul. I did my schooling there, with a background in pedagogy in science education. At that time, the pressures of war and of conscription forced me to flee Afghanistan. My father taught me literature, focusing on classical Persian poets Bedil, Rumi and Sa'adi. He always encouraged me to read Bedil's *Char Ansur*. I read the first two parts of *Char Ansur* with my father before I emigrated from Afghanistan. By the time I settled in Australia, my father had moved to Pakistan, from where he sent me more books to read. For the first few years after my migration to Australia, there were interruptions in my reading and literary interests. But then I was confined to my home for a while, which was extended to about six months. During this time, I returned to my literary books. I worked on the last two parts of Bedil. I read them at a distance with my father, over the phone.

Mujib: your father seems to have had a profound influence on you. This seemingly master-disciple (*pir-murid*) relationship, was it common for fathers and sons to have this sort of a relationship as you were growing up?

Omer: It could happen but also, it's not necessarily a universal feature of father-son relationships in Afghan culture. Growing up, there were seven of us in the household. My father tried to deal with most of us, but he seems to have found me more sympathetic to these scholarly traditions, the ones that he himself was trained in. My father had been trained in esoteric traditions by an Egyptian scholar who taught devotees from of a mosque in central Kabul. So my father wanted me to turn to Irfan (Islamic mysticism). I did, although I must say even before I emigrated, when I was about 22, I was interested in both esoteric works and in modern writings. For example, I liked reading texts on Wais Qaran, but I also liked reading Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*.

Mujib: the transition from being a reader to writing poetry must have been a gradual one. How did you come to write poetry?

Omer: As an avid reader of Bedil, I came across this verse, where he challenges his readers to speak for themselves. The verse reads: 'Why is it that one is always preoccupied with others - speak for yourself, Bedil, for you too are not so insignificant.' This awakened something in me. I found the courage to write, and my first piece of prose was a short *munajat* [poetic prayer]. The piece would eventually be published in my book *ishq o ihsas* [Love and Sensations]. From there I wrote some poetry, mostly satire, here and there. But it was scattered. From the mid-1990s, I ran a motel business in Melbourne. I had a lot more time to myself to write, read and study. Around the same time, my father's health had begun to decline, and he spent a lot of time at home. Telephones had improved. So I started working closely with him again. A lot of my writing is influenced by him. Then I had an epiphany in around 2005, when an incident at the Dandenong Mosque compelled me to use poetry to comment on the state of religion in the Muslim community. The poem is a critique of Islamic orthodoxy, because what I took away from that encounter was that I had no place in the mosque.

Mujib: can you talk a little bit about the purpose of your writing? Why do you think you write?

Omer: There is an impulse for why people write, a kind of creative energy that seeks a creative expression as a cathartic release. When you have access to the arts, you turn to them as a healthy outlet. I happen to have the ability to use language in a creative and playful way, and that is my art. I would not say that I believe exclusively in *ilham* [spiritual inspiration] as the reason for writing. Rather, I believe that the writer is affected by his/her environment. The things that happen to you, injustices around us, are reasons to write.

Mujib: I wonder if there are any tensions there between the various forces that you respond to in your work. For example, do you ever sense that your father might have wanted you to be more inclined towards Irfan [Islamic mysticism]?

Omer: To an extent, yes, there was some tension there. I remember, sometimes my father would notice certain books with me. He would pay attention to what I was reading, scrolling through my books and my reading list. He would talk to the family about the virtues of esoteric thought and practice but never outright discourage me from extending my reading list. I would try to write these down as a keepsake. I remember asking him about the position of Sufism in the pantheon of Islamic mysticism. As a young person, his teachings were influential. I would show up to school classroom with questions and discussion points from what he had talked about, because at school as well we were reading various Irfani texts. I enjoyed the attention that teachers gave me, because it looked like I knew more than my years perhaps indicated. It carried over to university and to life post-migration. I could articulate in spoken form and in writing, I thought, better than others.

Mujib: how do you approach the sources of esotericism across faiths in your work?

Omer: I think here in the West, they use the 'Orient' to refer to the East. I think this East/West dichotomy is an elitist construction, reflecting the view of the *khawas* [privileged classes]. The *awam* [masses] are not interested in such divisions. Ravi Shankar [an Indian sitarist] and any Western musician, say a violinist, can work together to blend both instruments into a more beautiful form. The political class and the elites reproduce such dichotomous language. Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islamic esotericism are one and the same when, for example one looks at the *muqams* [valleys] that awaits the ascetic seeker of truth: the ultimate goal is always the same *fana* [annihilation of the self]. The orthodoxy within each faith, however, compels the faithful to dismiss one another. A Hindu is not allowed to enter a mosque. In *Manaqib Al-'Arifin*, there is a telling anecdote about Rumi. Two drunken Christian men enter the monastery. Either on purpose or coincidentally, they rather violently push Rumi. His disciples come to remove the Christians and when Rumi asks why, he is told 'They are Christians, drunk and badly intoxicated.' Rumi replies, 'They have been drinking wine, but you are the ones who are behaving like drunkards.' He encourages them to stay and enjoy the event. I think it is telling.

Mujib: the work that you do from exile, how much do you think this carries the traditions that you were trained in pre-exile?

Omer: I believe that the traditions in which I was educated as a young person, neither the environment nor my years were suitable to give me a more holistic view of life. Now, of course, I can have access to more resources and I can study. So, I think, migration, has had its positive effects, because it has given me a more complete account of life. I feel a certain tension, but I have always maintained a respect for the work and depth of knowledge of those who stayed behind, and with that respect I think I manage to maintain a good working relationship with many scholars back home. Some years ago, during my visits to Kabul, I sat in on Haidari Ujudi's classes. from which I benefited greatly.

Mujib: Thank you for your time. Do you have any final remarks?

Omer: I have one final comment. When I encounter youth who dismiss our writings and works, I use my poetry and my writing to tell them that the skills and traditions that they learn in universities here are already reflected in the kind of work that I do. I hope for more understanding across cultural boundaries.

گوشه از تعبیر مقام عشق / On interpreting the valley of Love / By Omar Sabore

In Love, there is no valley but one of self-immolation

There is nothing but intoxication from wine, cordial and cup

One soars in the skies with wings

Alas, as it is for the bird, the open skies are all littered with traps

For it to be reflective of the gathering of desire

There is no name in everyone's skin

From the chest the sigh reaches for the skies

If the sigh comes easy, one's destiny won't be the heavens

Losing oneself to the land of eternity

For it is not a destination unreachable

The fly can turn to the legendary Simurgh in perception

The tongue that suffers from the affliction of no restrain

If abuse turns to well wishes in the universe

For you the sun of dawn is not the same as that of dusk

Sabore [a double entendre, Sabore translates to patience] quarrel with yourself, not others

Whose eyes are yet to experience letters

در عشق غیر سوختن مقام نیست
مستی ز شراب و درد و جام نیست
آسمان می پرد به بال پرواز
در بند و هوا چو مرغ دام نیست
آیینہ شود به بزم بینش
در پوست همه چو هر نام نیست
از سینه به آه منزل در آفاق
آسان بکشد و مرد بام نیست
رفتن ز خود در دیار باقی
منزلگه است که ناتمام نیست
سیمرغ صفت است مگس به پندار
آنجا که دهانی را لگام نیست
زشتی گر شود خوبی در عالم
خورشید سحر ترا به شام نیست
صبور گله کن ز خود نه از کس
در دیده که ادب نیام نیست

Interview with Hamid Parafshan

Mujib: Can you please tell us how you came to writing and your literary journey?

Hamid: I am originally from Kabul. I grew up, studied and worked in Afghanistan until the civil war of the 1990s, when I was forced to seek asylum in another country. Growing up and even after joining the civil aviation industry working as pilot for Afghanistan's national airline (Ariana), I had a profound interest in literature and poetry. While I have always appreciated Persian literature, I turned to writing poetry during the difficult years of the civil war and especially since my migration to Australia 26 years ago.

Mujib: It seems like school was an influential period. It is quite telling that in Afghanistan young children learn reading and writing by

reading classic Persian texts at the mosque and school. Have you always had an interest in literature?

Hamid: Yes, I have always had a keen interest in *adabiat* [literature]. From a young age, as was customary in Afghanistan, at the mosque and in our family settings we were introduced to classic Persian poets like Hafiz and Sa'adi. This interest would grow in me as I encountered other poets and works. This was quite influential in that by the time I was working as a pilot, I had the skills and command of language necessary to pen numerous epic poems. Later on, I would [self] publish these under the title *armaghan hashti saur* [*The Gifts of the Eighth of the Month of Saur*]. This was my first *dewan*. Later I published *Fazai Ghazal* [*The Air of Poetry*], which was followed by *Gul Distai Adab* [*The Garland of Literature*]. My latest collection of works, under the title *Gulbarg Ghazal* [*A Petal of Poetry*], was only recently published. I share my books with my readers and friends, and continue in my work.

Mujib: As an educated and skilled person in the 1980s and 1990s, were you involved in the politics of the time?

Hamid: Not really. As a professional, I was not allowed to be political or really take sides in the civil war. I felt that the state had invested a great deal in us, and so my only purpose was to serve the nation. In fact, I wrote the manuscript of *The Gifts of the Eighth of the Month of Saur* during the civil war of the 1990s. It was completed during the months of transition, between the fall of Rabani's government and the Taliban takeover [September 1996]. I only managed to publish it after my return to the Afghanistan in early 2000s.

Mujib: Can you speak to the content of your initial work? How did you balance the politics of the day with your interest in literature?

Hamid: The injustices and wrongs of the time fared prominently in my work early on. In fact, my home was ransacked, and all my property was looted. I went to the authorities of the Islamic government [or Ustad Rabani] and asked for redress. They didn't really listen to my pleas. That is why I wrote *The Gifts of the Eighth of the Month of Saur*. Most of what is

written has to do with my personal experience during that tumultuous period. I witnessed what the Rabani government was doing. I witnessed the destruction of Kabul by all the Islamist factions. I witnessed who fired at whom, where the fighting took place, and which factions destroyed which parts of Kabul. The collection captures these experiences in the form of rhythmic prose, in the traditions in which I was brought up in.

Mujib: I must say, to me that is exactly why your work is so impactful. It captures the horrors of war. I'm curious to know how you managed to escape those horrors. Tell us a little about your migration journey?

Hamid: I was active in the aviation service when during a short stay in Dubai, a colleague mentioned his willingness to assist me with my family's papers. I ended up in India first with my family and then later migrated to Australia as a refugee. As I had my pilot's licence, both from the U.S. and Germany, I wanted to find a suitable job in the industry. I went to the authorities here, but they asked me for an Australian licence. I managed to get my licence here, but then 9/11 happened. That event changed everything. It was made clear to me that Muslims were not allowed to work in the aviation industry, not even in the towers let alone on a plane. By then, I had about 16,000 hours of flying time under my belt, well above what is considered average in Australia, but there was nothing I could do.

Mujib: How was life, seeing how you couldn't find an appropriate job fitting your skillset due to reasons beyond your control?

Hamid: The Australian government helped, for which I am grateful. I also had some savings which I managed to bring with me to Australia. That helped in the beginning when we restarted our lives here. There were financial problems, no doubt, but I had to make do. All I wanted was for my children to study, which they have all done, and I am very proud of them. Over the years, the pain of the nation got to me. I was depressed and still take prescription anti-depressants. But I am doing better now.

Mujib: In terms of the content of your work, what traditions or schools of thought are most prominently reflected in your work?

Hamid: From early on, going back to school, I was always interested in the tradition/sabk of Bedil Dehlavi [Indo-Persian poet; 1642-1720], what is referred to as the *Sabki Hindi [Classical Hindustani School of Poetry]*. Later, on further examination, I realised that most of his work was Irfan [Muslim mysticism]. I realised that I should turn to Irfan as my path. Bedil wrote in Farsi, even though he was from India and lived and worked there. Because this is the language spoken in Afghanistan, Afghans are most infatuated by him. And because Sufism and Irfan have a unique place in Afghanistan, Bedil speaks to Afghans. In India – even in Iran – Bedil is losing people's attention. That is rather unfortunate. Luckily, while this may be the case in Bedil's birthplace, the wider world continues to share an appreciation for Irfan and spiritual art form. I am glad to be following in their paths.

گلبرگ غزل / A petal of Ghazal / By Hamid Parafshan

In this wicked world, we have forsaken notions of good and evil

Once life's joys were gone could we enjoy the fruits of love

Before the eyes could appreciate hyacinth and lily

From this garden, our harvest was only the wet eye

The way of division and hate, from enmity, was riddled with stones

I gave up on trying to cross this path altogether

We planted the seedling of love and passion in our hearts

From this reed, our harvest was sweet sugar

My heart was preyed upon from the pretty trap of love

I became learned on this art from the book of Love

Those who went astray from this path were struck but I

Found glory and conquest in this, my bowed head

For a while, from lust this heart went after accumulation of wealth

This naivety of mine, in seeking gold, only led me to wickedness

I cleansed this chest from envy so that it found calm

From the crevasse of contentedness, I discovered a treasure of gold

Wine freed me from the confines of religious dogma, to soar infinitely

In the space of fellowships, I could open my wings and unwind

Hamid's good place, where he rests, cannot be this oppressive homestead

I'm but a recluse, having packed up and ready to leave this world

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