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Silken Thread(s) of *Qissa*: Secular and Sacred Geography of Converging Cultures

The movement of people across the globe has been instrumental in the enhancement of trade, communication, and cultural reciprocity. One such instance of converging cultures is the fecund literary genre of *qissa* (legend or folktale). The *qissa* tradition lies at the nexus of Perso – Arabic and Indian vernacular aesthetic forms (specifically the Punjab region) offering vital insights into the process of production and consumption of narratives that travel across spatial and temporal boundaries. This paper proposes a study of *Sohni – Mahiwal Qissa*, one of the famous tragic romance tales of the Indian subcontinent. At the heart of its plot lies the trade route between Bukhara (Afghanistan) and Delhi of eighteenth – century India. Tethering the Eastern and Western countries, the Silk Road has enabled an exchange of not only goods but also cultural and religious practices. By the same token, the Persio – Arabic genre of *qissa* traveled to India with the caravans only to thrive in the regions of medieval and early modern Punjab and gradually making its way into verses composed in a few other vernacular languages. Its migratory behaviour has endowed it with features of what the scholars of transmediality studies call ‘participatory culture’.

The public mediations of *Sohni – Mahiwal Qissa* have percolated into diverse audio – visual media and occasions direct or indirect references in verses emerging from folksongs, Sufism, nationalist discourse, etc. This makes the narrative a perfect site of intersection of public memory, performative traditions, and vernacular historical consciousness as the sacred and the secular patterns of the region(s) are interwoven within the fabric. This paper maneuvers to identify ways in which the form and content of the tale transform within specific religious and secular spaces while maintaining its inherent idiosyncrasies as the characters essentially become the site of performative memory.