



# HEDAYAT, SADEQ V. HEDAYAT IN INDIA

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Melancholic and gloomy, Sadeq Hedayat (Şādeq Hedāyat) sailed for India at the invitation of his friend and biographer Shin Partow (1907-1997), the Persian vice-consul in Bombay in order to review the Persian script of a movie that was being shot there (Hedayat, letter to Minovi, in Bahārlu, pp. 180-81). Hedayat's sojourn in India helped him to add a new aspect to the corpus of his works and also provided him with the opportunity to study Middle Persian with the Parsi scholar [Bahramgore Tahmuras Anklesaria](#), which led him to translate a number of Pahlavi works into New Persian (see [Hedayat iv](#)). His story "Mihanparast" is apparently a reflection of his experience during the sea trip to India.

The details of Hedayat's stay in India from 1936 have remained obscure. Although the guest house where he stayed as a paying guest is mentioned in his letter to [Mojtaba Minovi](#) (in Baharlu, pp. 180-81), letters do not provide sufficient information to specify its exact location. However, his short story, "Lunatique" (Persian version: "Hawasbāz") gives a description of a house which matches with the Summer Queen at 6 Arthur Bunder Road in Mumbai ([Figure 1](#)). This was a boardinghouse in the past, as confirmed by the novels of



Sachin Kundalkar (p. 217) and Šin Partow (p. 42). The presence of a century-old elevator in the Summer Queen made of iron and wood and the lift mentioned in the story “Lunatique” (pp. 149-50, 177) confirm that the paying guest in the story is Hedayat and that the present building of Summer Queen is the same guest house as that in the story. The building, however, consists of eight apartments, and it is difficult to determine in which apartment he was residing, because no documents provide any idea of it, although he mentions (1963a, pp. 147, 180) that he had rented a room on the ground floor (*martaba-ye tahtāni*). Therefore, the only source on which one can depend is the fiction of Hedayat himself, reflecting the real-life event, an art which he used in his previous works. (Homa Katouzian [1991] has highlighted many such in Hedayat’s fiction.)

In “Lunatique,” Hedayat is portrayed as a paying guest living on the ground floor, who listens to Indian music and looks at the street outside the window, where a poor patcher (*pāraduz*) by the name of Bhagvan (Pers. Bāgvān) was coughing and causing disturbance to him. His room had a view of the sea through the window (Hedayat, 1963a, pp. 146-47, 150, 176, 179; idem, 2008, p. 560). Based on this account, the exact location of Hedayat in the building can be identified, since the building has a semi-octagonal corner on the southeast side (Figure 2), with a view toward the harbor; the view to the north or west is toward adjacent buildings. One can thus ascertain that Hedayat lived on the ground floor room of the east wing of the Summer Queen (Figure 3).

During his stay, Hedayat traveled to the southern part of India. However, his visit to Hyderabad was not comfortable, since his hosts were away on a trip, and he returned to Bombay in a dirty, third-class coach of the train sitting near the toilet (letter to Minovi, in Bahārlu, p. 189). But he visited the kingdom of Mysore at the invitation of Prime Minister Mirzā Esmā’īl, to whom he had been introduced by [Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh](#). There he received royal treatment, attending all the ceremonies of the royal birthday party of King Krishna Raja Wadiyar IV, who was called Mahārāja when Hedayat visited the kingdom (Hedayat, letter to Minovi, in Bahārlu, pp. 188-89). The account of the city cannot be traced in his literary work except in *Hāji Āqā*, where he once mentions the King (Mahārāja) of Dakan (Hedayat, 2008, p. 178), but the picturesque details of the city of Bangalore and its suburb Kengri are vividly recorded in his poignant literary piece “Sampingué” (Pers. “Sāmpinga”; Hedayat, 1963a, pp. 124-43), which confirms that Hedayat must have visited Bangalore. The minute description in “Sampingué” narrates the entire social



fabric of places in Bangalore and its surroundings. There are clear mentions of places in Bangalore that still exist, such as Ganesha Temple, Vani Vilas Hospital (Vānivilās), and Lal Bagh (Laʿl Bāḡ). In the story, he visits them. They are near the palace of Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore (1783-99), which might have attracted Hedayat to look at the Persian inscription carved there.

The story of “Sampingué” (name of the main character in the story) has the milieu of the city of Bangalore and its suburb, Kengri, narrating the poignant story of a Brahman family and the ill fate suffered by his family members. Laxmi (Lākṣmi), the pregnant elder sister of Sampingué, is admitted to the hospital to deliver her child (Hedayat, 1963a, pp. 128-29, 140; idem, 2008, p. 554). Vānivilās, the name of the hospital in the story, is that of a hospital located in front of the summer palace of Tipu Sultan in Bangalore. It is one of the major hospitals in dealing with maternity and child health care. This evidence confirms that Hedayat not only visited the hospital, but also closely observed the ambience of the hospital and later added appropriate details to the story.

Later in “Sampingué,” Sita (Sitā), the other character in the story, was engaged to Civa (Sivā), who was a custodian of a Ganesha (Elephant God) Temple in Bangalore. Nearby, there existed a similar temple by the name of Dodda Ganesha, of which Hedayat gives a graphic description in the story. The depiction of the temple in the story is no less amusing than his portrayal of the Lingam temple in *Buf-e Kur*. Hedayat writes about the temple when Sita visits his fiance in the above temple:

In the leisure time Sampingué used to visit his fiancé at the temple of the great idol Ganesha, who was made of a monolithic rock drenched in black oil. The temple was decorated with garlands of mogra flowers with a fringe of ashek leaves and filled with the perfume of aloeswood and frankincense (*ʿud wa kondor*), and Sivā, half-naked with a loin-cloth around his waist, smiling at pilgrims from the top of the altar

(Hedayat, 1963a, pp. 127, 140; idem, 2008, p. 553)

A person visiting the temple today will find the same scenario as that depicted by Hedayat in the late 1930s (see Bengalooru Tourism for description).

Sadeq Hedayat was indeed a story writer par-excellence who did not project



only Iran in his stories, but also depicted India as naturally and factually as he could. He recorded important and material moments of the part of his life that he spent in India in his works. In short, the stories of Sadeq Hedayat that have an Indian tinge are not simple concoction or figments of imagination, but facts recorded in fiction.

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