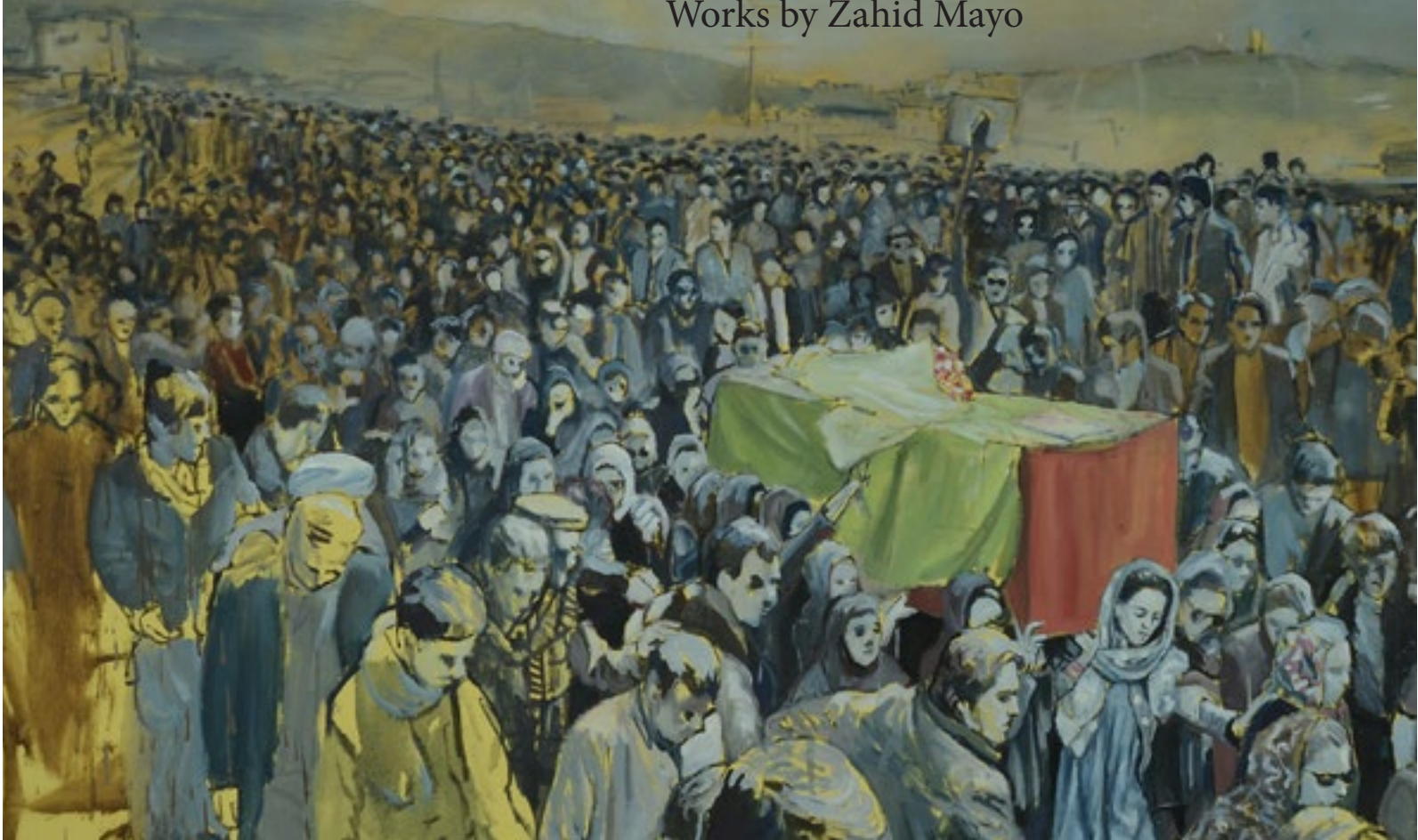


بیگانیاں مورتاں دے انجانے واسی

Works by Zahid Mayo



Michelangelo، Delacroix، Rembrandt، Whistler، یہ وہ مغربی اساتذہ ہیں جن کی تصویروں پر زاہد میو کی بیشتر نئی تصویریں انحصار کرتی ہیں۔ لیکن میو کی یہ تصویریں کوئی چرب، کوئی نقالی نہیں ہیں۔ وہ ایک مخصوص سہہ رخی عمل کا نتیجہ ہیں جسکے دوران وہ انہیں چن لیتا ہے، اپنے اندر جذب کر لیتا ہے اور اپنے اسلوب میں ڈھال دیتا ہے۔

وہ انہیں مخصوص رنگوں کا لبادہ پہناتا ہے، انکے تاریخی یا اساطیری سیاق و سباق کو عصرِ رواں کے سیاق و سباق میں بدل دیتا ہے۔ انکے کرداروں پر نئے چہرے چڑھاتا ہے (قندیل بلوچ عوام کے قافلے کی رہبانی کرنے والی، آزادی کی دیوی بن جاتی ہے۔ حضرت آدم و حوا، ہابیل کے جسدِ خاکی کو گود میں لٹائے شامی مصیبت زدہ بن جاتے ہیں۔ ایک نایابا بھکاری نے بابا آدم کی جگہ لے لی ہے، جسے خداوند کریم خیرات دے رہا ہے) اور جو تصویریں اس کا یا پلٹ سے گزر کر متشکل ہوتی ہیں، انہیں منتقلیاں کھا جا سکتا ہے۔ منتقلیاں اسلئے کہ میو انہیں نئے اسلوب، نئے زمانے (عصرِ حاضر) اور نئی جگہ (پاکستان، شام) کی طرف منتقل کرتا ہے۔

اس طریقے سے ان تصویروں کو جنہیں ہم نے ہزاروں مرتبہ دیکھا ہے اور جنہیں ہم بے حسی سے دیکھتے ہیں، ایک نئی حیثیت کی ترجمان بناتا ہے۔ وہ انہیں میوزیم کی تنگ اور تاریک چار دیواری سے نکالتا ہے اور انہیں مغربی سرمائے (جو ان سے اشتہار بنانے پر تلا ہوا ہے) اور ریاستوں (Delacroix کی تصویرِ فرانس کے نوٹوں پر چھپ گئی تھی) کے شکنجوں سے بچا کر، ان مصیبت زدہ لوگوں اور بد حال خطوں میں لے جاتا ہے۔ جن میں انکے پیغامات اور علامات جو سرمائے اور ریاست کی زد میں آ کر رائیگاں جا سکتی تھیں، حوصلہ اور معنویت پیدا کرتی ہیں۔

زاہد میو نے اساتذہ کی بڑی خدمت کی ہے۔ اس نے انکی تصویروں میں نئی روح پھونکی ہے۔

ژولیاں

Julien Columbeau

۱۴ مارچ ۲۰۱۷



Ek Janaazah, 120 x 180 cm, oil on canvas, 2017

The Unbearable Fright-ness of Being

Quddus Mirza

Being a Muslim woman you can join a funeral procession only if you are dead. Since according to tradition females do not accompany men who carry coffin while reciting verses from the Holy Quran before offering funeral prayer and then depositing the body in its eternal adobe, the grave. This custom – generally accepted, practiced and understandably never questioned – indicates a specific scheme/structure of Muslim societies: Segregation in the funeral rites is a reflection and reassertion how women's role, position and sphere are decided and determined – by the other gender.

As is the case, that we normally are oblivious to all oddities of our lives, so the segregation of sexes at a Muslim man/women's final journey never appeared unusual or even was noticed, till an incident from Afghanistan was reported in the news. Men refused to participate in the last rites of a woman who was accused of adultery, so it were women who led her funeral procession, finally followed by men. This picture, in the innumerable collection/world/web of images holds a special significance, because it informs about the state of women in a male dominated society, as well as affirms how a considerable part of population can take action in order to claim her rights, and show solidarity with others of the same gender.

I came across the same image, incidentally on 8th March, the International Women's Day, but painted by Zahid Mayo at his studio. The painter, in his new body of work has focused on the state and status of women, through history, art and in our culture. In this large canvas, outlines of women wearing headscarves and holding the coffin of their

deceased sister were drawn in quick strokes, marks that due to their minimal nature have a maximum impact. Replicating the effect and power of the picture which because of its uncommon nature/sight conveys how our surroundings can be surmised in a single snapshot: of an unusual occurrence, in a busy street of city. Likewise the craft of Mayo, transcribing the 'cruel' and 'kind' image communicates the continuing conflict between sections of a society.

These sections, or segregations, can easily be described using the term of gender, an obvious scheme of things, but more than merely war of sexes, it is about the clash of classes. How the privileged part of population subjugates the other, lower earning group of society. Even if females from all classes – rightly and heroically – struggle, voice and fight for their equal rights and freedom, yet maids serving in posh houses are still abused, by the lady of the house (if not by her husband, brother, or son – a terrible situation). However if a male member of family is discovered taking advantage of female staff, usually his behaviour is ignored by the women relatives only to protect the honour of their household.

Zahid Mayo draws our attention to that awful situation by depicting women who were killed (one should not use term 'sacrificed', because it connotes a sacred duty) in order to save family honour. In the work, derived from Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, Mayo transforms the usual character, the topless figure of French ideal/idol leading the fight for freedom with the face of Qandeel Baloch. A model/actress who was assassinated by her brother apparently to salvage the family name; a girl who provided bread and every other facility for her parents, brothers and several relatives, but her ending up a hot topic of prime time talk shows became the unbearable fright-ness of being.

Qandeel Baloch, the candle (as her name sounds and means) was extinguished by her siblings, but it left a mark on the growing industry

of information, which thrives on selling images – even on the cost of lives, safety, peace and secure future of those it is representing. Lately, the media has emerged as a monster that devours everything which is in its close vicinity – just to get top ranking in competition with other news channels. So one is accustomed to witness a reporter pressing his microphone to the side of man who just – barely – survived a bomb blast – seeking his reaction, comments and interview. This lust for the sensational commentary, which is eager to poke critically injured, morally defeated and socially discriminated for the gain of ‘ratings’ is such a practice that now everyone accepts it as one of evils of information age.

But not Mayo, who has placed a television microphone next to the half clad figure leading the revolution – for her views. She is holding the flag inscribed with words in Urdu that translates ‘freedom of speech’; and is accompanied by men in black outfits (a reference to lawyers, the upholders of justice). However more than that, the emblem of freedom – French as well as our Punjabi damsel – the most important aspect of the composition by Mayo is the inclusion of a small selfie stick next to the heroic figure of ‘Liberty’. This gadget testifies how our lives have been altered by the vice of projecting ourselves and our minor acts (having a meal, taking a shower, traveling to work) on social media as great landmarks in the history of mankind, must be recorded, remembered and shared by the whole humanity – at least those who use Facebook and Instagram! News are reported of people dying while trying to take their selfies in a zoo, on the top of a cliff and amid a cyclone. Perhaps the twenty-first century is about converting everyone into an artist – at least an image-maker: as Teju Cole observes: “There is a photograph coming at you every few seconds” and, “380 billion photos were taken in 2011, and about 10 per cent of all the photographs currently in existence were taken in 2012”.

But there are other acts in the history of mankind that have a far reaching

impact in human consciousness and our approach towards past. For example Jesus Christ having Last Supper, Christ being crucified, quarrel between Cain and Abel, and several other incidents/landmarks, which not only shaped the course of history but altered our views and points of view about it. All these are written in sacred texts, but are also illustrated by painters of great importance, value and worth, such as Leonardo da Vinci and Caravaggio and several others. References from their paintings and other sources are seen in the current works of Zahid Mayo, which besides their painterly quality and remarkable level of skill convey a basic fact – truth. History, despite the passage of years – has not changed in terms of basic behaviours and attitudes. Thus what Zahid Mayo portrays, based upon his impressions of old paintings, myths and modern day happenings, completes the scenario of our existence, that can only be described through the playful brush of a painter, who reflects upon his times. Yet employing a language that is condense, concise and complex, like the diction of art history, and the vocabulary of popular media, without much difference or distinction among the two. Like the high art or popular art, scared imagery or secular idiom, conscious compositions or random rendering, two sides of same coin that is still in circulation in the mind, canvas and life of Zahid Mayo.



Azaadi Ki Devi, 150 x 150 cm, oil of canvas, 2017



Adam-o-Mulk-e-Sham, 120 x 180 cm, oil on canvas, 2017

بیگانیاں مورتاں دے انجانے واسی

میرے خیالاں ویھڑے

نت آن کھلوندے

میں نمانا

کجھ نہ جاناں

بس جی آیاں نوں بولاں

جھکدے جھکدے، کنبدے ہتھیں

سوچ دا بوہا کھولاں

میرے بوہے آدم آیا

اڳ پتر، سنے حوا چایا

پروہن چاری دا فرض نبھاواں

لکھ واری میں صدقے جاواں

میں پچھیا، بابا جی!

کیہہ سیوا میں کر سکدا

کجھ نہ آکھے بابا آدم

اڳ پاسے بس ویکھی جاوے

ماں حوا وی کجھ نہ بولے

اکھیں بھر بھر ہنجو ڈولھے

فیر میں ڈٹھا، پیراں نیڑے

جواں بچڑے دے سر دے پاسے

سوہا رنگ

تبکا تبکا کھلری جاوے

Zahid Mayo: The Painter as Shaman

Qalandar Memon

In the fragments below I comment on my understanding of the work in this exhibition. The aim is to give the viewer notes with which to read the works presented. These are not the artists understandings and they need not be shared by the viewer.

I see Zahid Mayo as an artist of the subaltern. He isn't their spokesperson but he senses them and is able to register that sense on canvas. This is his success. I recall in my first visit to his studio about four years ago that there were two types of works on his canvases. Nudes of women he had made while on a residency in Europe and images of working people of Pakistan at *melas* of shrines. The first were voyeuristic. The second registered the atmosphere of the crowd gathering at a *mela* with sympathy and compassion. This exhibition brings together works developed in the second category and it is here that Zahid is on surer ground. Like an animal whisper, like a shaman, like a good psychologist and healer, he just gets something about the subaltern...he registers with them and is able to represent moments in their history of pain and violence with something approaching honesty. The function of dividing the energy of a group and representing it without speaking for it is historically seen as the domain of poets and it is for this reason that I see him as a painter/poet of the subaltern.

The Centre Stage

Zahid is appropriating compositions from master painters: Whistler, Rembrandt, Delacroix, Michelangelo and the lesser known William-Adolphe Bouguereau. In doing so he follows a well rehearsed motif of

recent Pakistani art to allude to western or Mughal art and refashion it with something distinctly Pakistani. In itself, this would be disappointing. However, something far more interesting is happening in these transpositions. They are telling stories of our times in the grand history style and we need to listen to these stories.

Let us examine three canvases in more detail. Let us look at those who take the centre stage.

The work that uses Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* is reused with Qandeel Baloch at the centre. Qandeel's story in outline is well known but worth retelling. Qandeel was married against her wishes at the age of 17 and was abused by her husband. Leaving him she worked as a bus hostess and then began to work as a model. She took ownership of her image by using social media and soon established herself in the imagination of the 'public'. Her selfies and videos by-passed the traditional media and editors and gave a power to her to set her own discourse. She gained a form of self ownership. In this sense, indeed, she was Liberty leading the people. Discourses around sexuality, sensuality and desire became for the first time the characteristic of a woman in the public space. A woman could denounce politicians, cricketers, *mullahs* and men. In one of her final interviews she noted: "Nothing is good in this society. This patriarchal society is bad". Patriarchy, then, killed her. The conduit was her brother. Zahid puts her in the centre of the stage, with a selfie stick in one hand and a flag in another. However, whereas, Delacroix lived at a time of revolution, Qandeel and Zahid live in dark times. Qandeel marches alone. She enters the centre of the stage only to be taken off. The crowd remain uniformed in their timidity. In contrast, in Delacroix's work the crowd follow Liberty to freedom – guns in hand they are in revolutionary zeal. They have lost fear and they appear ready to take down what Fanon called, 'the granite block', what we call, the 'establishment'.



Khairaat, 120 x 180 cm, oil on canvas, 2017





Fatima Jinnah is cast as *Whistler's Mother*. Alone in the room, ghostly, she partially gazes at us. Like Qandeel, Fatima Jinnah, too had stepped forward to take on the 'granite block'. In 1965 she dared to run for president against the dictator Ayub Khan. She was supported by all the sane people of the time – from poets like Habib Jalib to young sub-nationalists and anti-imperialists of the National Awami Party. A rigged election saw her lose. She died in 1967 in her home in Karachi. There is a mystery to her death. Some claim she was murdered. Either way, her attempt to join together with the sub-nationalists to chart a course for a decentralized Pakistan challenged the 'granite block' centralizing tendencies. Her accusing gaze, loneliness and ghostly figure remind us again of our timidity in the face of the established – for isn't it us who have left her there?

Women carry the coffin of Farkhunda from the ambulance to the graveyard in Kabul. In the outer circle men and women form a chain to guard the coffin and those carrying it. In this canvas Zahid is re-working a photograph of Mossoud Hossaini, a photographer with the Associated Press. The original event took place in the heat of the day – with the sun bearing and bouncing off the concrete cement of three storey buildings. Zahid has cooled the temperature (lighting the hues) and therefore made it tranquil – as a funeral of a martyr should be. Farkhunda was killed the day before the events presented on the canvas. She was accused of burning our Holy Book – by who, it is unknown. She was then mercilessly beaten, stoned, set alight, left to burn, and then thrown in the river Kabul. The ordeal was caught on many phone cameras. I saw a few clip for a few seconds of one of these videos at the time and have not been able to forget it: hundreds of men shout abuse at her, she stumbles around looking for a safe place, no one steps forward. Her head is oozing blood, her face is covered in it. She is hit with stones and later her body is burned to a char. I am reminded again of Qandeel's words: "Nothing is good in this society. This patriarchal society is bad".

The identifiable protagonists, are those who have stepped up from the crowd - Fatima Jinnah, Qadeel Baloch, and Farkhunda - they have a history (that of martyrs). But what of the crowd.

The Crowd

They remain on the fringe of the canvas and, therefore, the fringe of history. I am reminded of Marx's writings on the French Revolution. He notes that the crowd (working class) had formed itself at times for the its own goal and at times for the goal of the bourgeois. In either case they had made history by taking down the monarchists. However, no such revolutionary moment occurs in Zahid's painting. There is no optimism. The crowd – us – merely pick up the bodies of the occasional martyrs; unable to stop the bombs, or the violence of the system or our own violence. We muddle along, offering scarifies to ideologies - there goes Abel, and there goes Qandeel, and there goes Farkhunda . The status quo - the ruling alliance - the granite block - holds sway...

The subaltern/crowd here are violent, muddled, victims and perpetrators. There aren't any simple narratives. It is just what it is. Some will survive by grit and by staying in the background, if they are not drawn out by Zahid, if the figures in the crowd remain the same, it is because that is how they survive. Where the Haitian revolutionaries and the French revolutionaries rose to end their oppression, for now, our crowds gather only to bury the dead.

Palimpsest: A Brief Note on Zahid Mayo's Style

Palimpsest is a text written on top of another one, but which lets traces and marks of the previous one appear and disrupt its meaning.

All artists rework their canvases/images/sculptures. Starting with one



Tareek Raah, 150 x 150 cm, oil on canvas, 2017



Adam-o-Mulk-e-Sham (II), 120 x 180 cm, mixed media on canvas, 2017

painting in mind, painting it clean, start painting something quite different. Few leave the traces to be read.

The Dadaist and Surrealist thought it honest to leave marks of the unconscious in their work. Such canvases or works are ridiculed by most artists/art world figures that I know in Pakistan. Collectors and galleries in Mayfair prefer the fine laser points and Mughal figures. The artists must show his technical brilliance and add a 'gimmick' - Zahid too has his gimmicks but I will leave that for another time. The line has to be neat, the canvas well worked...that is...the artist is only an artist if he is a crafts person first.

Zahid works his canvas like a child does the slate. Marking, drawing, thinking, painting, erasing, and then thinking more and erasing more... after a day the subject can change. From structuring a canvas around *The Last Supper* he can go to structuring it around the story of Cain and Abel. If he did not have to display his work, his canvases would continuously change. The point of saying a work is finished, is artificial for Zahid. He told me, he knows it is finished when 'it feels right'. But I have heard him say that on many visits to his studio only to see the canvas painted over and reworked by the next visit.

Yet, Zahid's canvas is like a palimpsest in that the traces remain. He leaves them there for all to see. The canvas captures the process. The erasures, the failures, the drafting and composing are left for the viewer to enjoy. And what a joy for those of us who prefer a perfunctory drawing of Rembrandt to his finished works...for those who like a sketch book of an artist rather than the 'curated solo show'. There is something naive about it all. Look at the sketch book of any artist and you feel you will see something of their soul...something of their inner thoughts... and their process.

It is this process at work in the two versions presented here of Adam and Eve holding the body of Abel. Both paintings are set in the bombed out urban areas of Syria – probably Aleppo. They are left at difference stages in the process and yet they are distinctly finished. In so far as Zahid's canvas is his sketch book.

You can see the brush strokes, the colours at work...you can learn about the process by noticing his outline in black/brown of figures on part of a canvas and at another point a near fully painted figure...each figure, each part of the canvas is at a different stage of the process and it is left that way because that is 'honest'.

It is a form of truth and a form of naivety. A naivety that evokes the mystical mood of poetic and artistic creation...a mode associated with children, *fakirs*, *babas*, the mentally ill (so defined), drug addicts, the pained, the shaman, and counter enlightenment figures like Freud (in that he sees the unconscious and the 'slip' as valuable) and Marx (in so far as ideology always finds its way into our everyday relationships), and of course...of course...the subaltern...it is a mode from which we seek comfort, inspiration, wisdom and truth.

In this exhibition Zahid Mayo offers us precisely this. Like a true shaman, I am sure, Zahid isn't conscious of it; but he gets it, he senses it and he shows it. And he tells us of an uncomfortable truth: that of our collective timidity in the face of the 'granite block'. It is a hell of a truth to take on. But isn't it what it is.



Untitled Being, 90 x 150 cm, oil on canvas, 2017



Madar-e-Millat, 120 x 180 cm, oil on canvas, 2017

میں آدم زاد بت اک مٹی دا

میری ڈوہنگی ہستی

میری ہوند، جیویں بیلا کوئی

ایتھے سوچاں اگن رکھاں وانگ

کتے ٹھنڈی چھاں

کدائیں سکے کیکر

تے مرجھایا ہویا

اک صبر دا بوٹا

تھلے کنڈیاں والی راہ جاوے

میں آدم زاد بت اک مٹی دا۔۔

میری ہوند، ہنیرے ورگی

جتھے کجھ نہ دسدا

کجھ نہ سجھدا

پر جنی لو کوئی چا آوے

میں آدم زاد بت اک مٹی دا

میری ڈوہنگی ہستی

میری تصویریں نہ تو کسی مسئلے کا حل ہیں، نہ کوئی جامد نظریہ اور نہ ہی کسی مہارت کا دعویٰ۔ مجھے Paint کرنے کا عمل اچھا لگتا ہے اور میں اپنے Canvas پر یہ عمل دہراتا رہتا ہوں۔ ان Paintings میں موجود کرداروں کو میں نے موجودہ اور قدیم تصویروں میں دیکھا اور وہاں سے ادھار لیا اور انہیں موجودہ حالات کے تناظر میں اپنے Canvas پر منتقل کرنے کی کوشش کی ہے۔

زاہد میو

Zahid Mayo

۴ مارچ ۲۰۱۷

This catalouge accompanies the exhibition

بیگانیاں مورتاں دے انجانے واسی

Works by Zahid Mayo



Publisher

Sanat Initiative

F-39-1/A, Block IV, Clifton

Karachi, Pakistan

Printer

The Times Press (Private) Limited

Photograph (Back Cover)

Wajid Karim

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S A N A T