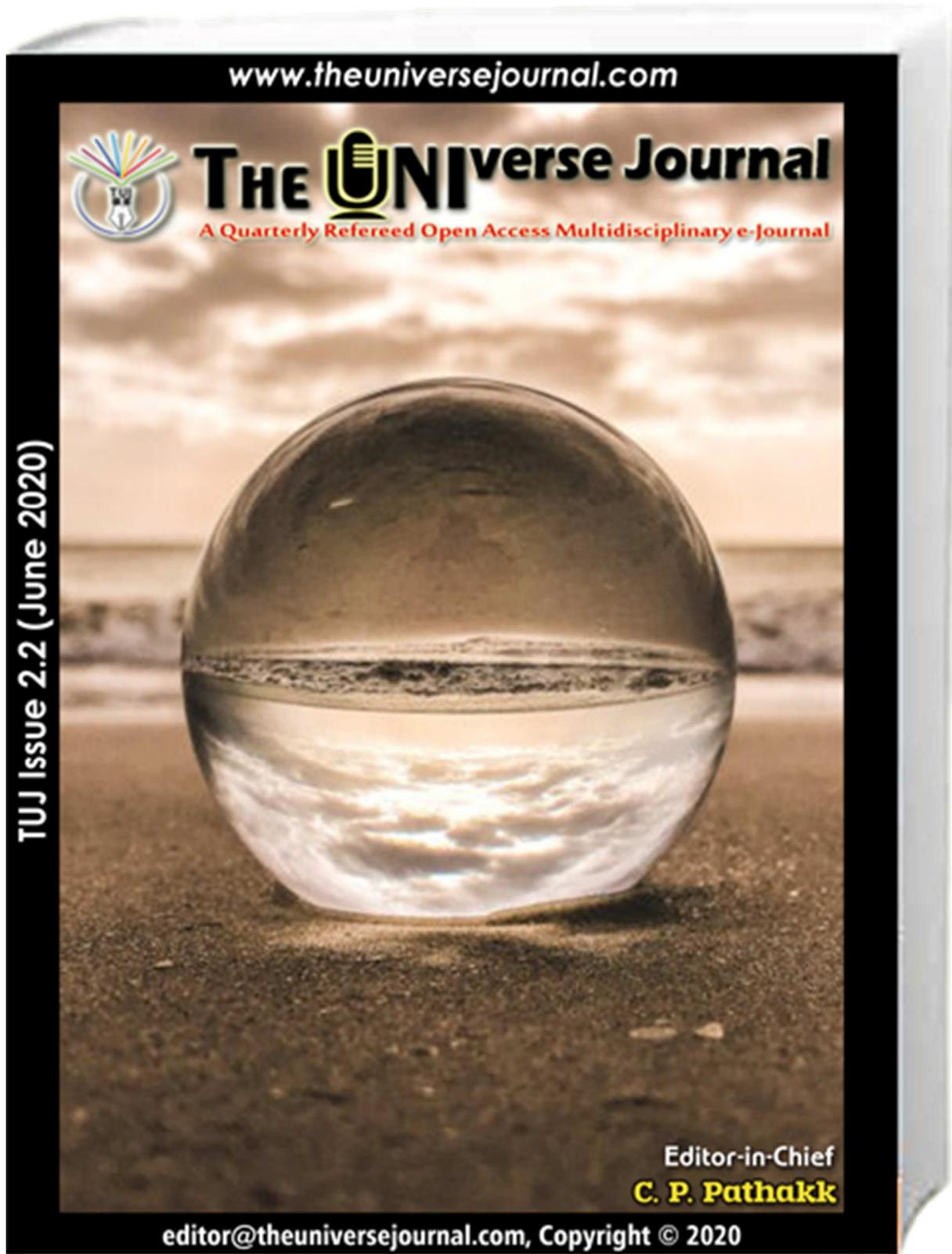


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“The Eunuch's Whisper”
*Translated from Hijre ki Sargoshi**

Translated by Raza Naeem

*'What of me and my war song!
For centuries
Holding a sword in my hand
I stood guard day and night
I was the palace guard
Where a bird dares not flap a wing*

*There was a time
When this land was happily disposed
I was the special messenger of joy
No doubt the generation of my ancestor is severed within me
Seedless like a tree
Which will become extinct
I am the fable of 'brevity' as opposed to 'eternity'
So that is why
I always remained alive in the shadow of mercy, for all eyes
Nobody great or small dared to win my curse, even by mistake*

*The world changed
Now there is merely a noise here
Those whose sadness of mind and heart is evident
I hear their abuses
In this age
In this noise
What even I can do!*

*In this thought
I began to look towards the sky accidentally
I could see strong youth
With opened parachutes, in the air from afar
Towards the earth
And among them two girls
Were they Her? Him?
This difference vanished
Some began to lament and mourn*

*He-he what calamity!
Darkness!
When women begin to work like men
Of what use will be this beard, this moustache
Will men now become pregnant even
How will we be able to say male and female?
Will the damned now force the devout to utter Farsi!*

*Such thoughts arrived
And frightened the heart
Increasing confusion between masculinity and femininity
Majnun became a he, and Laila she
Then rushing to hit me saying,
'Wretch! This is all your fault alone'*

*I laughed
I clap to bring joy to your heart
Then silently say just this much
The bedroom is not the only existence
Raise your gaze to see
How blue is the sky
I too can fly a plane in it
I too can descend opening a parachute*

*What you keep repeating day and night
Have words lost their meaning?
Lost just in revision
Rack your memory
Maybe you can see
in a being with a soul
the light of God'*

**Translator's note:* There are only two international days remembering and celebrating transgender people. Despite the fact that transgender people have existed since time memorial, and mentioned in some of the oldest texts of the Muslim world, like *The Arabian Nights*, they have been the source of much mystique, ridicule and discrimination. Even in the 21st century, they have been among the last groups of people to get their rights in legislation and otherwise. Fahmida Riaz, who passed away in November 2018 has expressed the plight of the *hijra* in a masterful poem *Hijre ki Sargoshi*, which forms part of her final collection of poems

Tum Kabeer. It is unique among the oeuvre of poems on transgenders in Urdu, in that none of our front-rank feminist or female poets have written on the hijra prior to this poem. It was written in response to the sarcasm over another poem *Hijre ka Rajaz* (The Eunuch's War Song) and is an interesting, even provocative reflection on how the roles, rights and responsibilities of the eunuch have changed in our midst from then to now. I was motivated to translate this poem by attending a screening of Hammad Rizvi's award-winning short film *Rani* last year, which tells the story of the eponymous transgender woman in Karachi who sets out to take care of an abandoned child. One moment in the film especially struck me, when the lead actress played by noted transgender activist Kami Sid, is hit by some street loafers and one of them addresses the former saying, "Why didn't they kill you at birth?". This original translation of Riaz's powerful and lyrical poem attempts to explain and crystallize why.