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THROUGH A PERSIAN PRISM:
HINDI AND PADMAVAT IN THE MUGHAL IMAGINATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH ASIAN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

BY
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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
DECEMBER 2000
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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

For words of Sanskritic origin I have followed the Library of Congress scheme, with two modifications. The tālavya śa is transliterated as sh (as is the Perso-Arabic letter shīn). Thus, Kailāsh and not Kailāś. For Perso-Arabic and Sanskritic words the nasalization is represented by ň.

Words of Persian or Arabic origin are transliterated according to their Urdu pronunciation. For example, soz rather than sūz and Bedil rather than Bīdil. The Hamzah has not been represented in the transliteration system since in Urdu pronunciation it is elided.

For words of Perso-Arabic origin the scheme I have used is as follows:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I will begin with what may sound like a word of ingratitude. In a sense my stay at the University of Chicago has been irrelevant to this dissertation, for it had begun to work itself into being on that day, long before Chicago, when I first heard Begam Akhtar sing the ghazal and was immediately convinced of Urdu and its imaginative universe. From here it was a short step into the world of tasavvuf—without which both Urdu and the ghazal would be impossible. What moved me subsequently to write this particular dissertation was a growing respect for the aesthetic and spiritual depth of the Indo-Islamic culture, and a growing fear that the aggressive politics of Hindutva will not rest until it has buried all vestiges of Urdu from a shared North Indian culture. Through her superb art Begam Akhtar opened for me the door to this culture, and she did it posthumously. I am, therefore, the Uways to her revelations.

I also dedicate this to my grandfather, Sri Vijay Kumar Joshi, who prepared the ground in which Begam Akhtar eventually sowed the seed. I remember him especially on those occasions when, dictionaries by his side, he passionately debated the use and resonance of words—whether in Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu, Bengali or English. In so doing he impressed upon me very early the joy of taking language seriously. Without the contagion of his passions my thesis would have been narrower in its ambitions.

But, of course, none of this need have shaped up into a dissertation had it not been for the help of numerous friends and advisers in both Chicago
and India. Among advisers I must thank A.K. Ramanujan, Ed Dimock and Norman Zide for their exquisite taste, gentle encouragement, and kindness. With everything he did and said Ramanujan impressed upon us the need to be sensitive to the esthetics of academic writing. I hope that this dissertation lives up to his expectations. Norman Cutler has been a wonderful friend, and the most conscientious reader--though everything I given him to read has been tardy. John Perry patiently helped me decipher three worm-eaten manuscripts that would have driven anyone batty, but they didn’t so much as make a dent in his crisp humour. And so, we laughed our way through Jayasi and Razi. As my adviser in Delhi Muzaffar ‘Alam directed me to specific manuscripts. I thank him for his unfailing good cheer.

The thorny road of being a graduate student at Chicago was smoothed repeatedly by friends. Here my greatest thanks are to Anne Blackburn for her many gentle ministrations: endless cups of tea in a warm kitchen, as well as practical advice about love, and hence inevitably, grief. Without Allison Busch’s dazzling smile Chicago would have been bleak, and doing Hindi lonely. I thank her for our many conversations about Hindi, and about life. Jennifer Rycenga, Arjuna Guneratne and Kate Bjork dragged me out for birding trips, thus keeping alive my awareness of life outside the confines of academia. Patrick Nugent talked to me of things most meaningful and inspiring--medieval monks and miracles--, helping me put in perspective my own labours in the scriptorium. I discovered Daisy Rockwell and Barney Bate very late in my stay at Chicago, but we’ve shared some good guffaws. My roommates Jim St. Andre and Laura Barghussen transformed the apartment
into a true home through the alchemy of their impassioned cooking. They also put up with all of my culinary abominations—including the apricot pasta and the chalky risotto.

In India my closest friend Jyoti Pande insisted on my entering the realm of the marsiya at a point when my interest in Urdu had plateaued out at the ghazal. The hours we spent arguing the relative merits of Begam Akhtar and Sahgal were pure joy, though in the end we always disagreed. I thank Balbir Singh for introducing me to Maulānā Azād at the tomb of Humayun, Sunita Rao for distracting me from Urdu with, once again, birds, and Marina Chellini for watching everything from behind the purdah and adding a wry comment here and there. My aunt and uncle Shirina and Rohit Joshi, and my great aunt Nandini Joshi, provided a home without which I would not have lasted a month in India. Sharif Qasimi, Fātimah Vasiya Jayasi, Viqar al-Hasan Siddīqī, Akbar ‘Alī Khan Arshizadeh and Sayyida Hamid not only helped with access to archives but they also talked to me in the chasteest Urdu, which for me is always the point of being in India. Muhammad Tavakkuli Targhi egged me on as we travelled together, and propped me up when I flagged. Amiya Kesavan of Fulbright House, and Pradeep Mehendiratta and K.L. Suri of AIIS watched out for me and introduced me to key people.

But of all the people in India it is to Sayyad Yunus Jaffrey that I owe the greatest professional debt. Had he not held my hand through those early days with Razi’s manuscript, and had he not made me those marvellous cups of tea (the best I’ve had anywhere) this project would have remained
confined entirely to Hindi. I remember very fondly my daily trips to his rooms at the Anglo-Arabic school in Ajmeri Gate.

Finally, I must thank my two primary advisers: Sheldon Pollock at Chicago, and Carl Ernst at Chapel Hill. Shelly’s greatest gift to me is the gift of discontent—for he has always exhorted his students to soar up and take the larger view of things, to never be satisfied with the small picture. I don’t know just how far up I have managed to soar. But I am trying. Carl, of course, has been much more than an academic adviser. By introducing me to the Sufis of Khuldabad when I was a mere undergraduate he completed the process begun by Begam Akhtar. It was he who suggested that I turn my attention to Padmavat, and it is with him that I have had the most stimulating conversations about Muḥgal culture. From Carl, as from Shelly, I also learnt the value of discontent when he introduced me to the works of Coomaraswamy. Lest my gratitude be fulsome I will simply borrow the words of Mirzā Ghālib and say:

Divār bār-i minnat-i mazdūr se hai ḍham

The wall sags under the weight of the mason’s favours.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

ki 'ishq āsān namūd avval vale uftād mushkil ĥā

...for love seemed at first a cinch--
and then the problems came

Hāfiẓ of Shīrāz

I.1 An Unknown Reader: "Love Seemed at First a Cinch..."

At a distance of over three centuries Muḥammad Shākir’s life is to us
an unrelieved expanse of dark. It is a random ray that picks out one point in
this darkness; but it does so with startling precision: on Thursday, the first
day of the month of Muḥarram, in the year 1086 Hijri, Muḥammad Shākir of
Amroha stamped his seal on the last page of a manuscript he had copied in
Hindi and then translated into Persian. The time, he tells us piously, was just
before the hour for prayers in the third watch (seh pahar) of the day. And so,
in the early evening of March 28, 1675 he bequeathed to us the oldest existing
manuscript of Muḥammad Jāyasī’s celebrated romance, Padmāvat. But along
with this Muḥammad Shākir gave us something far more fragile. In the
margins of his translation he scribbled such responses as occurred to him while copying the Hindi text. It is these ephemeral jottings that permit us to chart the course of his imagination, to read along with him despite the distance which separates us, and so to begin asking questions about how he and we respond differently to the same narrative.

The narrative over which Shākir labored celebrated the love of Ratnasena, the Rājpūt king of Chittaur, and the Sri Lankan princess, Padmāvaṭī. The romance was deflected, however, from the conventional closure of ‘happily ever after’ by a third character—the Emperor of Delhi, Alāūddīn Ḫalījī, who mounted a raid on Chittaur to kidnap Princess Padmāvaṭī. Rather than fall into the hands of the lustful emperor, Padmāvaṭī and all the women of Chittaur ritually burnt themselves to death following the Rājpūt code of honor, even as all the Rājpūt men died on the battlefield. It was neither love nor death, then, but virtue that had the last word. By the sixteenth-century this tragedy was already well-known in North India; but in 1542 when the Ṣūfī poet Muḥammad Jāyasī wrote it in the Avadhi dialect of Hindi, calling his version Padmāvat, he embellished a well-known tragedy so sumptuously into a collage of intertextual references that it became, and remained for the next three centuries, ‘a hit’.¹ It was this classic which our

¹My assertion of Jāyasī’s Padmāvat as a hit in Mughal India is based partly on the great abundance of its manuscripts in both Indian and Western collections, but mostly on the attention lavished on it by Persian-writing Mughal authors who, during the three centuries of its ‘literary life’ produced no less than twelve retellings in Persian. In this Padmāvat was not alone. Other Hindi, and especially Sufi texts, were also translated in Persian. But Padmāvat is unique in the frequency with which it was retold. It seems, therefore, to have resonated louder than any other Hindi narrative in the literary imagination of Persianized Mughals. The issue of its many retellings in Persian and other Indian vernaculars and our uncanny
scribe was reading, copying and translating that evening when we intercepted him in the one moment of his life visible to us.

But مُحَمَّد سَحِیر was no mere clerk, slavishly copying the thousand odd pages of Hindi in Arabic script, punctiliously placing diacritics over every Arabic letter that the reader may correctly pronounce the Hindi words, and then hammering out a literal Persian translation. He was a man of both imagination and erudition, and as he worked on Jáyasí's narrative it sparked in his imagination snatches of classical Persian poetry; these lyric verses he inscribed on the margins in such a way that they press in on the Hindi of Jáyasí’s text, becoming more than just marginalia. They seem, at times, to spring from the mouths of the otherwise Hindi-speaking characters.

For example, at a turn in the narrative when King Ratnasena hears of Padmāvatī’s stunning beauty and imagines himself in love, and his counselors warn him of the snares of infatuation, Sākīr remembers a couplet:

\[
\text{Alā ayyuhā al-sāqi adur kās'an wa nāwil hā} \\
kī 'ishq āsā namūd avval, vale uftād mushkil hā}^2
\]

O cupbearer, seize the goblet and pass it around for love seemed, at first, a cinch—and then the problems came

The infatuated king is thus doubly warned: first in Hindi, and then in perhaps the most famous words in the entire tradition of Persian poetry—

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silence about them in contemporary criticism is the subject of an extended discussion later in this chapter.

Shams al-Dīn Muslim Muḥammad Ḥāfīz, Divān, ed. Muḥammad Zahrāyi (Theheran: Intishārat-i Hosh o Abtakār, 1373/1953), p. 81, no. 1. Quoted in Muḥammad Shākir Amrohavī, Padmāvat (Rāmpur: Rāmpur Razā Library, ms. #1), f. 31b. All subsequent references to Ḥāfīz will be to the Zahrāyi edition.
the two lines Shākir remembered are the opening couplets of the most frequently-read Persian classic--the Dīvān of Hāfiz (1326-89). Through the learned medium of Shākir's imagination Hāfiz spoke to Jāyasī, bridging the two centuries that yawned between them. In the following pages I will frequently return to Muḥammad Shākir's response to better identify the central questions with which I grapple in this thesis.

I. 2 Contours of the Thesis

This is, above all, a thesis about response. The response of a pre-modern, Persianized community of elite authors to their overwhelmingly Hindi, Hindu and Indic environment. It seeks to identify the contours of that imaginative framework within which Persianized Mughal intellectuals responded to both the Hindi language and Hindi literature. The aggregate of idealized images and representations articulated by Hindi literary texts may be called a 'Hindi imaginaire' This is a study of the creative uses the Persianized Mughal elite made of the Hindi imaginaire. To do so was to step

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3 In other words, the 'imaginaire' is a world-view as it emerges especially in literary texts. The concept needs careful elaboration, and forms a large part of the discussion at the end of chapter 3. It is a term developed by French cultural historians like Georges Duby who speaks of the difficulty of severing "the objective study of human behavior from investigation of the symbolic systems that dictated the conduct and justified it in men's' eyes," and also of the difficulty of stripping away "the ideal garb in which societies of the past cloaked themselves," so that the question which emerges is: "Can we see them [i.e. the historical subjects of study] other than as they dreamed of, as they spoke of themselves?" The imaginaire might then be defined as 'the ideal garb' which we have to examine before we can penetrate to the 'concrete relationships within society.' See Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 8-9.
across several boundaries—certainly a linguistic boundary, but also that subtler boundary which separated the world of Persian imagination from that of Hindi. Both of these imaginative worlds, or imaginaires, were necessarily different from our own; they inhabited a 'region of unlikeness'. Venturing into them should, therefore, be a fully deliberate journey away from ourselves. When we fail to do this we inevitably read a very different imaginative world in terms of our own concerns. In embarking on this journey, therefore, I constantly cast my glance back at our own responses—at how we, in the twentieth century have responded to Mughal texts like Padmāvat by reading them anachronistically within the framework of one peculiarly modern concern: the identity of the Indian nation. In thus reading the Mughal imaginative world with reference to the Indian nation we have animated it with our anxiety about Hinduism and Islam as two irreconcilable forces threatening the Indian nation. We have, in this process, ignored a range of meanings historically evoked by Mughal texts in the imagination of their Mughal readers—meanings which were rooted in a different soil of concerns altogether. I am interested in the recovery of these lost meanings and concerns, for the contrasts between them and the meanings we construct speak eloquently of the conception of an elite Mughal identity and its

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5 It is, of course, anachronistic to talk of 'an Indian identity' for Mughals, but my argument, especially in the fourth chapter, is that in a number of Mughal Persian literary texts (e.g., Rāzī's *Shamʿ o Parvānah*) we see a very conscious juxtaposition of India and Iran as well as Hindi and Persian. How should we read these juxtapositions? Clearly to read them as indicators of a nascent Indian identity would be simple-minded; but these juxtapositions of Iran and India, Hindi and Persian do hint at a Mughal elite preoccupation
relationship to Islam, Sufism, Persian, Hindi and Hinduism. But the contrast also speaks of our own self-definition and relationship to these categories.  

A word, then, about what this thesis is not. This is only partially a thesis about Padmāvat. I have not attempted an exhaustive survey of either the literary structure or narrative 'sources' of Padmāvat, for my ultimate concern is with the larger issue of the imaginative responses of the Persianized Mughal elite to their Hindi and Hindu literary environment. If in the last two chapters of this work I dwell at length on Padmāvat it is because it offers a particularly good compass to chart the vagaries of this response.

Padmāvat, was a verse-romance written in 1542 by Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī, a provincial Śūfi poet initiated in a branch of the Chishti order established in what is now central Uttar Pradesh. Although Padmāvat stands alone in the immense popularity it gained in Mughal India, it was part of a genre of closely related narratives retrospectively called Premākhyāna (love-

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6 The 'our' here refers primarily to both academic and non-academic South Asians, and not to the North American or European academic community. Although, this brings up, of course, the interesting question of the extent to which the area studies researcher 'takes on' the identity, responses, attitudes and biases of the area which he studies.

tale) by Hindi literary critics.\textsuperscript{8} Premākhyaṇas share the common feature of being love tales which are simultaneously narratives of spiritual quest—the protagonist’s search for the beloved serving as a metaphor for a journey towards spiritual maturity. These narratives were originally written by Mughal and pre-Mughal Ṣūfis\textsuperscript{9} in the Avadhi dialect of Hindi, and subsequently retold in Persian as well as other Indian vernaculars, especially Urdu and Bengali. Finally, the Premkhyanaṣ share the common feature of being thematically very heterogeneous, a feature which continues to intrigue the modern reader above all else. Padmāvat, for example is woven of intertextual strands taken from both the Indian epic Rāmāyana, and a Ṣūfi martyrology. Such thematic hybridity makes Padmāvat a particularly useful lens through which to view the Mughal imagination in its negotiations with its Indic environment.

\textsuperscript{8}The generic designation ‘Premākhyaṇa’ is of late nineteenth-century provenance, and coincides with the efforts of Hindi literary historians’ construction of a canon of Hindi literature to accompany the emerging Indian national identity. Mughal readers of these love-tales called them by various names: ‘dāstān’, ‘qiṣṣah’ and, in one notable case, ‘mašnāvī’ (see next chapter). But even though Mughal readers did not coin an umbrella-term to refer to texts like Padmāvat, they did, nevertheless, perceive a thematic and structural unity among the various Hindi Sufi love-tales, for they were often read, translated and bound together in the same collection. For example, our scribe Muḥammad Shākir, prefaces his translation of Jāyasi’s Padmāvat with verses from an earlier Premākhyaṇa, the Candāyana of Maulānā Dāūd (folio 1a). Such paratextual evidence points to the generic continuity which Shākir must have perceived between these two texts separated by more than a century and a half.

\textsuperscript{9}Medieval North Indian literature abounds in Premākhyaṇas but the four Premākhyaṇas accepted by Hindi critics as ‘canonical’ were written in the period between late-fourteenth to mid-sixteenth-centuries. In chronological order they are: Maulānā Dāūd, Candāyana, ed. Māṭāprasāda Gupta (Vārāṇasi: Visvavidyalaya Prakāshana, 1967), written c. 1380 C.E.; Qutbān, Mrigāvatī, ed. Māṭāprasāda Gupta (Vārāṇasi: Vishvavidyalaya Prakāshana, 1967), written c. 1503 C.E.; Manjhan, Madhumālatī, ed. Māṭāprasāda Gupta (Allahabad: Mitra Prakāshana, 1961), written in 1545 C.E.
It was not just thematic, but also linguistic hybridity that engaged Mughal elites. Here again Padmāvat provides a good base, for it was retold several times in Persian during its continuing textual life in the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries. I look in particular (chapter 5) at one such Persian retelling, the Sham‘ o Parvānah (Flame and Moth, 1658), also written by a Sufi, ‘Aqil Khān Rāzī (1614-1692)--governor of the city of Delhi under Emperor Aurangzeb in late seventeenth-century. Thus, while not writing an exhaustive account of Padmāvat, I use it and one of its Persian retellings as a textual base from which to launch forays into the Mughal imaginaire during some two and a half centuries of its cultural hegemony in North India.

I.3 Mughal Imagination and Reader-responses

Let us return to our erudite scribe. In freely quoting Hāfiz at various turns in the Hindi narrative Shākir was not perhaps very unusual for a Mughal reader. A crucial point to bear in mind while reflecting upon a response like Shākir’s—and one which requires a leap of imagination on the part of a modern English speaker—is the extent to which poetry was a spoken reality in the social relations of Mughal Persianate culture. In a culture such

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as ours—where poetry largely appears in print, and is read in the privacy of one’s leisure time—it is difficult to imagine that in the Persianized circles of Mughal India poetry circulated like currency; it was traded back and forth, with social interactions prefaced by appropriate couplets and rhetorical points clinched or refuted by an epigram. In a culture where poetry was largely oral and where one’s recognition as an educated person depended on one’s ability to command a given social situation by producing appropriate couplets, the instant recollection of a series of related poetic fragments was not only possible, but had been honed to the level of a delightful game.\(^{11}\) If poetry enjoyed such currency, the mere presence of a particular word or image in a couplet would trigger a series of associations with other couplets.\(^{12}\) The Mughal reader existed in a world which didn’t just look different but sounded different. It was a far more sonorous universe. In this universe of spontaneous reminiscences and poetic echoes a text like *Padmāvat* existed in a complex network of intertextual fragments which an educated reader would inevitably invoke during the act of reading, and which would orient

\(^{11}\) The overwhelmingly oral and aural nature of Persian and Urdu poetry has been commented upon by nearly everyone familiar with the poetic traditions. For example, see Ralph Russell, “Understanding the Urdu Ghazal,” in *The Pursuit of the Urdu Ghazal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 31-51. But the best way to grasp the indispensability of poetic reminiscence in Mughal conversation is to read a prose text like the letters of Ghalib (for what is true of Urdu can also be said, without great modification, of Mughal Persian culture) see Mirzā Asadullāh Khān Ghalib, *Urdu Letters of Mirzā Asadullāh Khān Ghalib*, trans. Dāūd Rahbar (Albany: SUNY, 1987).

his interpretation of the text. For the sake of convenience, and to distinguish
them from other responses, I will refer to such spontaneous responses as
‘readerly.’

Identifying the Mughal responses to Padmāvat requires, therefore, a
recovery of those intertextual echoes and poetic reminiscences which form
the readerly responses. Of course, in hosting such ‘intertexts’ Padmāvat is no
different from any other text, every text being “woven entirely with citations,
 echoes, cultural languages, antecedent or contemporary, which cut across
it...in a vast stereophony.”

But the recovery of the readerly intertexts which
Mughal readers inscribed on the texts they read, and translated is a specially
difficult task, for such reminiscences are usually mental events which leave
no physical trace; when on those rare occasions they do leave traces, it is
usually as marginalia in specific manuscripts; and here their recovery is
made all the more difficult since our attention has largely been focused on
preparing critical editions of texts—and critical editions are seldom interested
in the accidental, unique and, often erratic, responses of individual readers,

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of ‘intertextuality’ and its difference from ‘influence’ see Helen Regueiro Elam,
more detailed discussion of the same issue see Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein “Figures in the
Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality,” in Influence and Intertextuality in Literary
pp. 3-37. And, finally, for the location of intertextuality in a range of other types of textual
processes see Gerard Genette, Palimpsestes: La Litterature au Second Degre (Paris: Editions
de Seuil, 1982), pp. 7-17.

14 For a stimulating study of marginia in manuscripts see Michael Camille, “Glossing
the Flesh: Scopophilia and the Margins of the Medieval Book,” in The Margins of the Text ed.
scribes or manuscript owners. Modern critics have limited their scrutiny of the Padmāvati-Ratnasena story to Jāyasī's telling of it in Padmāvat. In so doing we have acted on the assumption that once Muḥammad Jāyasī gathered the narrative strands of the Rājpūt tale of Padmāvati and Ratnasena into a bounded text, the narrative reached its essential form, so that any further tellings or translations of it are the many divergences from an authoritative center—but as divergences not really worthy of critical attention. In thus approaching Padmāvat, and indeed all Muḥal literature, we have been enshackled by what Barthes called the 'myth of filiation'—an excessively deferential attitude to the author of a text as its 'father' and primary controller of meaning. But the story of the love-triangle of Padmāvati, Ratnasena and 'Alāuddīn Khālīji—which had existed both orally and textually before Muḥammad Jāyasī—continued casting its spell on the imagination of generations of Muḥals after Jāyasī as well. Some of these readers responded to the narrative like Muḥammad Shākir, by introducing to it a new field of intertextual associations. Others, however, responded by retelling the

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17 For a discussion of the types of intertextual associations theorized by Muḥal authors see Paul Losensky, Welcoming Fīghāni: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Muḥal Chazal (Los Angeles: Mazda Publishers, 1998), pp. 101-114. Losensky is mostly interested in formal intertextuality for the purpose of answering (javab) or improving upon the verse of an earlier poet, not in readerly intertextualites spontaneously brought to
entire narrative in Persian, in a form that we may call a translation or 'transcreation'. This thesis is, among other things, a foray into the almost unknown terrain of these 'divergences'.

Rāzī's *Sham o Parvānah* is, of course, one such divergence, while another is the *Hangāmah-ye ʾishq (Clamor of Love)*, written in Delhi in 1739 C.E. by Ānand Rām Mukhlīs (1699-1751)--a Persianized Hindu poet, and lexicographer in the employ of the Mughal court as a secretary (*vakīl*). Mukhlīs' retelling differs from both Jāyasī’s and Rāzī’s in two respects: it is written in prose, and it is written for a largely professional-intellectual, rather than a Śūfi, audience. I will consider it very briefly in chapters two and three.

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18 For a catalogue of the Persian versions of this narrative see Sayyad Amīr Ḥasan ‘Abidī, 'The Story of Padmāvat in Indo-Persian Literature,' *Indo-Iranica* 15 (1962), pp. 1-11. ‘Abidī mentions twelve different retellings, and it is entirely possible that manuscript searches will reveal others. None of these Persian versions is a literal translation, hence my use of the word 'transcreation.' Rāzī’s *Sham*; for example, is a radically shortened version and he takes ample liberties in threading into its Persian body verses from Hindi poetry, so that the whole becomes a mosaic of Hindi and Persian.


20 Mukhlīs was employed as a *vakīl* by the Mughal vazir ʿĪtāmād al-Daulah from the age of eighteen (1719), and at the age of forty-one received the honorary title of Rāi-Rāyān (The Noble among nobles). For a selection from his Persian ghazals see Kirmānī, *Dreams Forgotten*, p. 344. For examples of his Urdu/Rekhtā ghazals and couplets see Jālibī, pp. 166-7. For an extended discussion of Mukhlīs see my next chapter.

A venture into the many Persian incarnations of the Padmāvatī-narrative is easier when we see Jāyasī as but one turn in the enduring flow of a popular narrative. And this is a profitable venture, for not only does it reveal new texts, but also a new range of meanings to which these narratives have been susceptible in their long lives since Jāyasī. These meanings, in their turn, reveal the spectrum of aesthetic, theological and political postures which Mughal elites assumed towards India, Hindi and Hinduism. Some of these Persian retellings are literal translations of Jāyasī’s Padmāvat, while others narrate a version only roughly similar to Jāyasī’s in its narrative outlines.²² The many versions, then, bear the same resemblance to each other as species within a genus. For the sake of convenience I will refer to the genus comprising the many tellings as ‘the Padmāvatī-narrative’. Unlike the modern Hindi critics, I venture into the terrain of Persian retellings with the assumption that the Padmāvatī narrative has as many meanings as its narrators. Indeed, if we approach meaning as a range constructed by readers in their encounter with a text (rather than as a unitary presence inherent in a text), then it is not just the many retellings and translations of the Padmāvatī-narrative that assume importance, but also its many readerly responses; for each reader creates a slightly different field of meanings by bringing to a narrative his own set of expectations and associations. Thus, in this thesis I

²²Mukhlīs’ Hangāmah, for example, is set in the Deccan and has a different cast of characters even though in its preface he states quite pointedly that he is ‘reclothing’ in Persian the tale that had been told by Muhammad Jāyasī in the ‘eastern dialect of Hindi.’ For a discussion of this see the next chapter. Rāzī’s Sham, by contrast, is a fairly ‘faithful’ rendition of Jāyasī’s Padmāvat though it is much abridged. For a discussion of this abridgment and its literary effects see the fifth chapter.
will examine two types of responses: first the sustained, and formal response in the form of a full-length translation or retelling, and second, the more casual readerly responses of a reader like Muḥammad Shākir.

One of my aims, then, is to free the Padmāvaṭī-narrative from its filial moorings and repatriate it within the larger field of its post-Jāyasī 'divergences.' I do this in part by adopting the metaphor of 'a network' suggested by Roland Barthes who speaks of a text as 'extending itself through a combinatory systematic.' This 'combinatory systematic' is most clearly visible in the instances of readerly responses like those of Muḥammad Shākir-responses which combine the Hindi text of Jāyasī with fragments from classical Persian poetry; but it is also evident in the formal textual retellings of the Padmāvaṭī-narrative by Bāzmī, Rāżī and Mukhliṣ. Finally, of course, this process is visible in the most common type of intertextual presence—that which is woven into the text by its original author in the form of either a quotation or an allusion.

I.4 Linguistic Hybridity:

"Throats Where Many Rivers Meet."

Again, I return us to Muḥammad Shākir—now to call our attention to the fact that in his reading Hindi and Persian are locked in so tight an embrace that it is only with a great insensitivity that we can pry them apart. Such a reader presents us with a challenge: to train our own imagination to
recognize those fleeting extra-textual resonances which added depth to what he copied in the manuscript. To rise to this challenge is to train our ears to hear both Jáyasí and Hāfīz—both Hindi and Persian; for it is in this simultaneous presence of two authors and two languages that we may discover the delight which compelled Muḥammad Shākir to persist in the tedium of adding diacritics to every Hindi word in the thousand and sixty-six pages of his manuscript. Thus, if we venture beyond the pages of Hindi critical editions and define Padmāvat according to its literary life in the experience of Mughal readers, then the ecology of what is conventionally held to be a Hindi text turns out to imply Persian as well. From this vantage-point Padmāvat does not seem quite so solidly a property of the Hindi literary canon. Is it not telling, then, that in the considerable critical literature on Padmāvat there is scant mention of Persian, even though almost everyone who has worked on Padmāvat has consulted this celebrated early manuscript?²³

Hindi critics show a variety of responses to the 'Persianness' of Padmāvat. Shyām Manohar Pândey, for example, readily acknowledges that Padmāvat is a Sūfi text and thus should be grounded in the tradition of the great Persian maṣnāvīs (long lyric poems).²⁴ But how exactly should it be

²³ Vāsudeva Shārāna Agravāla, for example, does mention that Shākir copied the manuscript in Arabic script, and included an interlinear Persian translation, but remains silent about the many Persian prose and verse comments which he also included and which make Shākir's manuscript such a unique source of reader-responses. Agravāla, Padmāvat, p. 18.

²⁴ And also in the tradition of classical Sufi thought. Thus, he spends much time discussing the thought of Sūfis like Ibn al-'Arabī, Ḥujwīrī and al-Ghazzalī. See Shyām
grounded? The relation Pândey suggests between Padmāvat and the Persian literary tradition is one of historical influence, and not active engagement through readerly responses as revealed by Shākir’s remembrance of Háfiẓ. For example, Pândey compares Premākhyānas to the mašnavīs of Niẓāmī and Khusro.25 I do not see any direct parallels between either the plot or the texture of Padmāvat and the works of Niẓāmī.26 Instead, in a manuscript like Shākir’s when Persian enters Jāyasī’s Hindi text it does so through the front-door—directly and boldly through readerly responses, rather than through a general narrative patterning implied by Pândey’s comparison.

The issue of multilingual intertextualities in Indian literary texts is not a narrowly literary issue, but, ultimately one of political vision and conviction, for our willingness to discuss, or ability to see, an active flow of intertextual allusions between Hindi and Persian depends on our vision of linguistic or religious purity. If, like Indian nationalists, we seek precedents for the Indian nation in a linguistically, religiously and culturally homogenous past, then such hybridities prove to be either annoyances or embarrassments. Methodologically, this range becomes visible only when we are willing to look at the specifics of a narrative tradition as it ‘incarnates’ in its many manuscripts; and this scrutiny brings into focus actual (and implied)


25 Ibid., pp. 26-36.

26 This point has also been made by Aditya Behl, “Rasa and Romance: The Madhumalati of Shaikh Manjhan Shaṭṭārī” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1995), p. 11-12.
readers involved in producing the manuscripts. If, instead, we focus on the abstraction that is the critical edition then responses like Muḥammad Shākir’s remain invisible, and so the Persian component of Padmāvat is reduced merely to an agentless ‘influence’.\textsuperscript{27}

I cite this example to open a window on what seems to me a pervasive and largely unexamined assumption of monolingualism (as well as ‘monoscriptism’) in the study of Mughal literature. By this I mean more than just the assumption that Mughal authors and readers functioned primarily in one language and one script; one significant corollary of the monolingual assumption is the facile equation we draw between literary traditions and religious, language, and script communities. Thus, Padmāvat comes to be situated exclusively within the confines of Hindi written in Nāgarī script. But as Shākir’s manuscript shows, even when cast in the Hindi language, Padmāvat could be written in Arabic script; furthermore, even the Hindi text of Padmāvat was fraught with so many intertextual allusions in Persian that to read it in all its fullness one has to look simultaneously at two literary traditions--the Hindi and the Persian.

To do justice to such a complex and adamantly heteroglot literary community it helps, I believe, to redirect ones gaze at the blurred peripheries.

of literary canons, for it is there that we glimpse the intricate interdependencies and rivalries—in a word the ecology—of literary communities. To thus excavate the ecology of Mughal literary communities means to begin thinking in terms of not this or that text, nor yet in terms of Persian, Hindi, or Urdu studies, but in terms of an entire literary area with its multiple literary voices and how these interact with each other. This is, admittedly, an ambitious task—one which South Asianists have scarcely begun to tackle, and scholars of Hindi have, for political reasons, positively discouraged.

My study begins with the recognition that even if we confine our gaze to Jāyasi’s Hindi Padmāvat we still have to venture beyond the Lakṣman-rekha of Hindi, and into the neglected tangle of the Persianate community—for this is where the text ‘lived’ its life as it was copied, translated, transcreated, memorized and commented on by readers like Muḥammad Shākir. As I see it, Padmāvat is edged on the one hand by classical Persian and on the other by Hindi. And implied in this range is Urdu, which unsurprisingly also had a tradition of Padmāvati narratives beginning at the end of the eighteenth-century.28 And it is in this confluence of languages and sensibilites that we may look for what is distinctive about Mughal literature—

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for no other Islamic culture has spoken 'through throats where' so 'many rivers meet'.

But this ecology of languages provokes a further question about their positioning. To continue the biological metaphor, just as no two species occurring in the same habitat may occupy exactly the same niche, so also in this ecology of languages Persian, Hindi and Urdu did not occupy the same literary space, or fulfill the same literary functions. Thus, to recognize an ecology of languages in the Mughal literary imagination is to begin asking about the relative positioning of these three languages. This is where I begin the next two chapters--with a discussion of the relative valorization of Hindi and Persian in the literary imagination of elite Mughals who valued Persian as the language of polite discourse. In discussing these questions I will not focus on either Jāyasī's Padmāvat, or on its many Persian retellings, for the issue of the Mughal imagination and the choice of languages is best examined by looking at a broad variety of texts in which the authors chose to create a mosaic of languages.

I.5 Thematic Hybridity and Nationalist Imagination

It is not, however, just linguistic hybridity that makes the textual tradition of the Padmāvatī narrative a particularly useful lens through which

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to study the Mughal imagination. By far the more salient characteristic of the Padmāvati-narratives, and especially Jāyasī’s Padmāvat, is their sumptuous thematic hybridity; thus, in discussing the response of the Persianized Mughal elites to both the Hindi language and the Hindi imaginaire we have to ask how this thematic hybridity was received by its Mughal readers, and what we have made of it in the twentieth-century. What exactly do I mean by thematic hybridity?

When Jāyasī refashioned the existing Rājput narrative into his Padmāvat he presented Princess Padmāvati as a Sri Lankan, and not a Rājput, princess.\(^{30}\) But there was a further embellishment of her character; in Padmāvat the Sri Lankan princess is held captive by her father, the king of Sri Lanka—just as Sita was held captive by Ravana. Jāyasī not only presents

\(^{30}\) Narratives of Khalji-Rājput conflict which provide the matrix within which Jāyasī’s Padmāvat is rooted stretch back to around 1400 C.E. The first recounting of this conflict is Nayacandra Sūri’s Sanskrit Hammīra Mahā Kāvya (c. 1400); subsequently the narratives of Khalji-Rājput conflict were written in vernacular. In chronological order they are: Narayanadasa’s Chitāi Vārtā in Braj (c. 1526?); Muḥammad Jāyasī’s Padmāvat (1540); Hemaratra’s Gora Bādal Padmini Carpa in Rājasthānī (1588); Jatmal Nāhar’s Gora Bādal Caupāi in Pingal (1623); Labhodaya’s Padmini Carita Caupāī in Rājasthani (1650). These narratives all present ‘Alāuddin Khalji as a lover in addition to a warrior. In addition there are several other accounts of Khalji-Rājput conflict in which Khalji is simply the conquering monarch and not a lover. These are: Padmanabha’s Kanhad-dev Prabandha in Rājasthani (1455); Bhandau’s Hammirayana in Rājasthani (1481); Amritakalasa’s Hammira Prabandha in Old Gujarati (1518); Mahesha Kavi’s Hammira Raso in Braja (1600-1610); the anonymous Viram-Dev Sonāgirā rī Vāta in Rājasthani (1704); and finally, Jodhraja’s Hammira Rāso in Braja (1828). Thus, it seems that although first textualized in Sanskrit, the Khalji-Rājput conflict soon found its greatest expression in a number of regional North Indian vernaculars, and that while the earlier narratives presented simply the martial aspects of this conflict, by the sixteenth-century North Indian Hindu, Jain, or Sufi poets were elaborating the conflict by presenting it as a conflict over love. Jāyasī is one of the first, if not the first poet, to present the conflict as a love-tale. For an overview of these narratives and how they present the figure of ‘Alāuddin Khalji see Alan Entwistle’s detailed article “Representations of ‘Alāuddin Khalji” (In Press).
Padmāvaṭī as a second Sīta, but also dispatches Hanuman to send her a message from Ratnasena who, while still in Chittaur, falls promptly in love with her upon hearing descriptions of her incomparable beauty. Jāyasi’s narrative, then, is partially woven of narrative strands taken from the famous Indian epic Rāmāyana. There are other echoes, however, which complicate the texture: when Ratnasena renounces his kingdom and becomes a wandering yogi (ascetic) in search for Padmāvaṭī his quest is mapped as the path of a Natha Yogi’s ascent through the seven bodily chakras (subtle psychic centers) towards union with the ultimate wisdom located, according to Yogic psychology, in the Brahmarandhra, the chakra in the head. And when Padmāvaṭī’s enraged father tries to kill Ratnasena for daring to approach his daughter, Jāyasi presents him as a second Ḥallāj—the famous ninth-century Sūfī martyred at Baghdad for his unorthodox theological views. Ratnasena’s impending martyrdom is miraculously averted when his true identity as the king of Chittaur is finally revealed. Marrying Padmāvaṭī he returns to Chittaur. Their love, however, is doomed when Emperor ‘Ala’ud-din Khaljī also hears of her beauty, and launches the siege which ruins both Chittaur and Padmāvaṭī.

31. Jāyasi, Padmāvat: 197.4-7. For the homology between Rama’s assault on Ravana and Ratnasena’s on the fort held by Padmāvaṭī’s father see Jāyasi, Padmāvat: 206.

32. For a clear homology between the yogi’s body and the fort see Jāyasi, Padmāvat: 215.

Thus, in restating an old Rājpūt narrative Jáyasī embellished it by weaving into it several intertextual strands—the Rāmāyana, a famous Śūfi martyrology, and Natha Yogic cosmology. Furthermore, he wrote it in Hindi at a time when elite Muslims preferred Persian as the language of formal, literary discourse. Such thematic hybridity would seem to disturb any clear formulations of religious dualism by implying authors who, though Muslim, were nevertheless conversant with both Hindu mythologies and Indian languages—as might be expected of an enlightened cosmopolitan unconstrained by sectarian divisions. Such, precisely, is the opinion of critics who seek the explanation for the hybridity of Padmāvat in the liberal and tolerant attitude of Jáyasī. This liberalism is explained in its turn as the inevitable result of the author’s Śūfi convictions. Here, for example, is Shirreff, the translator of Padmāvat into English:

‘His [Jáyasī’s] broad tolerance and understanding made him, above all, a prophet of unity...if we could ask him whether he had approached his theme from the Muslim or the Hindu standpoint, he would, I imagine, answer with a smile, that he did not know, and that he had never seen any difference between them. The gazetteer of Sultanpur records the fact that the district has always been singularly free from communal strife, and it would not be far-fetched to see in this the living influence of the poet.’

The trope of the pacific Śūfi bridging the gap between Hindus and Muslims has found special favour with liberal Indian nationalists reacting to

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34 A.G. Shirreff, introduction to Padmāvatī (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1944), pp. ix-x.
communalist formulations which construe India and Pakistan, Hindu and Muslim as historically antagonistic polarities defining the subcontinental landscape. A recent assertion of the liberal-nationalist view of the pacific Ṣūfī is by the President of the Indian Union, Shankar Dayal Sharmā, who declared Ṣūfīs as strengthening 'the process of peace, synthesis and harmony',\footnote{In Contemporary Relevance of Sufism, edited by Syeda Saiyadain Hameed (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1993), p. 1.} by their eclecticism and openness. If seen in the light of such explanations the Ṣūfī retellings of the Pādmāvati-narrative would seem to inscribe the irenic intentions of Ṣūfīs.

More sophisticated, perhaps, is the view of Aziz Ahmad to whom Padmāvat, with its dramatic restatement of the victory of Turkish forces over the Hindu Rājpūts, seems to belong to the same discursive field as royal panegyrics commemorating Muslim victories over Hindus.\footnote{Aziz Ahmad, "Epic and Counter-Epic in Medieval India," Journal of the American Oriental Society 83 (1963), pp. 470-476.} Ahmad points out that the martial sections of Padmāvat are based on that corpus of Rājpūt bardic texts which form the Hindu literary reaction to the growing Muslim dominance of the medieval Indian political arena. He claims that the Muslim impact in medieval India generated two literary growths: a Muslim epic of conquest asserting the glory of the Muslim presence, and its Hindu counter-epic of resistance. As an example of the former Ahmad names Ḍhazāin al-Futūh (Spoils of the Victories)--a royal panegyric which chronicles ʿAlāuddīn Khaljī's conquests of three South Indian Hindu kingdoms in the early
fourteenth-century. In this panegyric the poet Amīr  Kháṣr (1253-1325) presents 'Alāūddīn Kháļjī as both the champion of Islam against Hindu polytheists and as an irrepressible world-conqueror whose advance is finally checked only by the Indian ocean. The Hindu response to such hyperbolic flattery is embedded, Ahmad argues, in Rājpūt bardic tales which document the defeat of the Rājpūts, but simultaneously celebrate their valour in battle. Ahmad locates Padmāvat, within the literary tradition of these Hindu, Rājpūt counter-epics. With its plunder of the fort of Chittaur by the Muslim army of 'Alāūddīn Kháļjī, Padmāvat is a literary echo of the tension between the two religious communities.

It is also, Ahmad implies, a text which may profitably be read by establishing historical anchors for its many narrative details. To this end Ahmad isolates specific historical events which Jāyasī may have used to weave the narrative of Padmāvat. Thus, for example, he identifies a certain Muslim ruler, Ghiyas al-Dīn Kháļjī—a near-contemporary of Jāyasī’s, who had offended the Rājpūts by demanding that Rājpūt women join his haram (women’s quarters), and had consequently been attacked by a Rājpūt contingent in 1488. Ahmad concludes that there might be a conscious or unconscious conflation of the two Khaljīs in Jāyasī’s mind. Similarly, a mass satī (ritual self-immolation) performed in 1531 by Rājpūt noblewomen captured by a Gujarati Muslim ruler, Bahadur Shāh, provides the historical anchor for the culminating episode of Padmāvaṭī’s satī in Jāyasī’s text. But why should Muḥammad Jāyasī—who mentions his initiation by the famous Sūfī Saint Sayyad Ashraf Jahāṅgīr Simnānī (d. 1436-7), and thus leaves no
doubt as to his religious affiliation, restate a Rājpūt epic of resistance? Ahmad ascribes this irregularity to Jāyasī’s rural upbringing “away from the Muslim-oriented atmosphere of cities, where the Muslim elite was developing an anti-Hindu literature.” It was a rural lack of sophistication which inclined Jāyasī to accept “in all simplicity, at a non-sectarian level, the bardic legends of Rājpūt heroism against Ālāuddīn at their face value.”

In summation, the Ṣūfī retellings of the Padrāvatī-narrative intrigue the modern reader by appearing to be the literary embodiment of two trends. On the one hand, the modern ear hears in them pre-modern echoes of a toleration and eclectic cosmopolitanism expected of Ṣūfis, while on the other they seem a stray clause lifted from the general clamor of strident relations between Hinduism and Islam. These divergent views of the Rājpūt narrative and its Ṣūfī retellings converge, however, on one point: the assumption that an acute awareness of the historical conflicts between Hinduism and Islam is central to their readers—modern as well as medieval. In other words, the paradigm of Hinduism and Islam as antithetical entities is assumed an effective compass for the location of the meaning of these narratives. If this is so then these narratives imply a dialogue—whether irenical or strident—between two religious communities which have recently found discrete political expressions in the nations of India and Pakistan.

The larger question I probe in the second part of the thesis (chapters 4 and 5) is just how significant was the binary formulation of Hinduism and

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Ahmad, “Epic and Counter Epic,” p. 475.
Islam to the Mughal narrators and translators of the Padmāvatī-Ratnasena narrative. Did authors like Jāyasī and Rāżī conceive of their retellings as contesting dialogues between two communities historically at odds with each other? Did they compose in a spirit of non-sectarian liberalism, as Ahmad and Shirreff would have us believe? Or did they, as inhabitants of a 'region of unlikeness' use a different logic altogether which is not immediately visible to us? Did they invoke the dualities of Islam and Hinduism at all, and if so are the dualities structuring their retellings congruent with those invoked by modern critics like Ahmad? Finally, does the alleged antagonism between a historical Hinduism and a historical Islam constitute a significant dialogical axis in the Mughal retellings of the Padmāvatī-narrative, or might we better understand the dialogical thrust of these narratives as originating in the debates and contestations of the Śūfī and courtly communities to which their pre-modern authors and readers belonged?

In both Ahmad's and Shirreff's explanation a Hindu-Muslim polarity is the basic motor driving the Mughal literary imagination--the basic, inescapable fact of Mughal empirical reality to which the Padmāvatī narratives respond in one of two ways: they either assert the religious binarism and thus position themselves on the Hindu or Muslim sides of the fence, or they invert and deny the strict binarism in a liberal, syncretic--and thus allegedly typically Śūfī--vein. Assumptions about positionality, point-of-view, and authorial voice, then, are crucial to these explanations. This is where I begin the fourth chapter--with a discussion of the authorial stances taken by a number of Mughal authors (Nau'rī, Rāżī and Jāyasī) towards one
crucial motif in the Padmāvatī narrative—satī, the ritual self-immolation of widowed Rājpūt women. Satī is crucial to the narrative for two reasons. First, it provides a grand (and unforgettably dramatic) closure for the narrative, and second because it is an element which grounds the narrative unmistakably in the Indian soil. It is, therefore, one of those Indic elements which the authors use for creating the thematic hybridity for which Padmāvat is justly famous. It is thus, a good place to begin asking questions about the Mughal imagination and how it textualized an unambiguously Indic element.

Another way of creating a thematic hybridity is through intertextual (or extra-textual) allusions. We have seen one example of this in Shākir’s insertion of the verse by Hāfiz, and another in Jāyasī’s constant references to the Rāmāyaṇa as a parallel narrative to the story of Padmāvatī and Ratnasena. In the sixth chapter I will focus on two kinds of thematic intertextualities—first, the kind of ‘readerly’ intertextuality that is brought to the Padmāvatī-narrative by Muḥammad Shākir when he responds spontaneously to the text he copied and translated. I will distinguish between the kinds of readerly intertextualities he introduces and how these deflect the meaning of the text as a comment on the Hindu-Muslim polarity by grounding it within debates internal to the Muslim and Ṣūfī communities. Thus, in Muḥammad Shākir’s reading Padmāvat emerges as a response to the various social gradations and tensions within the Mughal elite community, rather than a Hindu literary response to the Muslim domination of North India.
I.6 Persianization, Islamization and Islamicization

Let us return for the last time to Muḥammad Shākir’s response and ask precisely what changes were effected by his insertion of Hāfiẓ’ Persian couplet into the Hindi speech of the counselors. We know from the way Muḥammad Shākir dated the manuscript that he saw himself unequivocally as a Muslim, for not only does he mention the year as 1086, thereby placing himself temporally in relation to Muḥammad’s flight to Madīnah, he also mentions the exact time of completion as the hour of namāz (Muslim prayers). Finally, since he had spent the better part of the year copying, translating and commenting on a Chishti text, it might not be far fetched to surmise that Muḥammad Shākir had ongoing contacts with the Chishti Ṣūfīs, and may even have been initiated in the order.

But we must concede that even though Muḥammad Shākir was a Muslim, a Ṣūfī, and probably a Chishti, there is nothing specifically Islamic, Ṣūfī or Chishti about his response in remembering and inserting Hāfiẓ’ verse. In so doing Shākir was responding neither as a Muslim nor as a Chishti Ṣūfī, but simply, as a member of the Muḥgal educated elite who valued Persian as a language of polite discourse and literary finesse. His response was largely an aesthetic response, and not what we might conventionally call a ‘religious response.’ It is, therefore, misleading to claim that his remembrance of Hāfiẓ lends the text a Muslim coloring; however, it would be correct to assert that it lends it a Persian coloring—and not just because it is in Persian, but because
the very idiom in which the verse was cast—with its positive valorization of wine, and its direct address to the cupbearer (sāqī)—is so unmistakably in the generic idiom of the ghazal, the Persian lyric. As we shall see in the next two chapters, neither wine nor cupbearers form the texture of the Hindi lyric; thus, Muḥammad Shākir’s remembrance of the couplet inserts Jáyasī’s Hindi text into a radically different poetic landscape. Shākir’s response may be said to ‘Persianize’ Jáyasī’s text by bringing it into the orbit of Persian imagery; and the resulting tone may be called ‘Persianate’, that is imbued with a Persian aesthetic, outlook and way of speaking, but without necessarily being from Persia.

At another moment in his reading of the Hindi text Shākir makes a very different readerly association—he remembers the figure of the saint Nizám al-Dīn Auliyā while reading about Ratnasena. What change this type of a reminiscence effect? Here we cannot claim that this intertextual allusion merely Persianizes the text. It does far more than this— it inserts the character of Ratnasena and the Hindi text within the stream of Sūfī history, drawing it into a network of relations which are more properly in the domain of Islam as a bounded and self-conscious religion. We might then say that the response ‘Islamizes’ the text.

The distinction I want to draw is between two processes—Islamization and Persianization, and the two adjectives describing the condition resulting from these processes: Islamic and Persianate. It is a similar contrast that the great historian Marshall Hodgson tries to develop between ‘Islamic’ and ‘Islamicate’:
The adjective 'Islamic...' must be restricted to 'of or pertaining to' Islam in the proper, the religious sense... When I speak of 'Islamic literature' I am referring only to more or less 'religious' literature, not to secular wine songs, just as when one speaks of Christian literature one does not refer to all the literature produced in Christendom. When I speak of 'Islamic art' I imply some sort of a distinction between the architecture of mosques on the one hand, and the miniatures illustrating a medical handbook on the other—even though there is admittedly no sharp boundary between. Unfortunately, there seems to be no adjective in use for the excluded sense—'of or pertaining to' the society and culture of Islamdom... I have been driven to invent a term 'Islamicate'. It has a double adjectival ending on the analogy of 'Italianate', 'in the Italian style', which refers not to Italy itself directly, but to something associated typically with the Italian style and with the Italian manner. One speaks of 'Italianate' architecture even in England or Turkey. Rather similarly, 'Islamicate' would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims.

In addition to the useful distinction between 'Islamic' and 'Islamicate', Hodgson also coined the neologism 'Persianate,' though he was not quite as careful in defining it. Bruce Lawrence offers a definition:

Persianate depicts a cultural force linked both to the Persian language and to self-identified Persians. Yet Persianate is more than either a language or a people; it highlights elements that Persians share with other non-Persian Muslims. Often Persianate is interchangeable with Islamicate. In examining a range of sociocultural norms lumped together under the term adab, one might use the qualifier Persianate, if one wants to stress the importance of

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Persian as a linguistic component, or Islamicate, if one wants to acknowledge the way in which Islam itself is invoked even when the connection between cultural observance and religious loyalty proves to be very slim. Sometimes the two terms are so close that they can be used interchangeably. Yet what remains crucial in each case is their expansion of connotative meaning to include more than linguistic usage (Persian) or religious commitment (Islamic).  

I use 'Persianate culture' to refer to a sub-category—and a further delimitation—of the field of Islamicate culture, from which it is distinguished largely, but not exclusively, through a deliberate use of Persian language, and expressive genres like those of ghazal. Historically Persianate culture has had fluctuating boundaries. In the Mughal era a Persianate sensibility pervaded the urban areas of the Turkic-speaking regions which are now the states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and, of course, Ottoman Turkey, but not North Africa, Palestine or Syria. The other great geographic area occupied by a Persianate sensibility was, of course, the South-Asian subcontinent, which, like the Turkic-speaking regions, used Persian as the language of polite, courtly discourse (but unlike Ottoman Turkey seldom employed the local vernaculars for bureaucratic use). The most direct heir of Persianate literary values in South Asia is) Urdu, which might again be analogized to Ottoman Turkish to the extent that both languages retain a

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40 For example, Marshall Hodgson sees pre-modern Turkish as ‘the most important literary language molded in the Persianate tradition.” The Venture of Islam, II, p. 486. For specific examples of the degree of Persianization of Turkish literary language in the Ottoman era see Walter Andrews, Poetry’s Voice, Society’s Song: Ottoman Lyric Poetry (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), esp. pp. 154-6.
native grammar, but are nonetheless highly Persianized—not just in their reliance on Persian vocabulary, but, more importantly, in the use of Persian forms of expression.

A tripartite division of Islamic, Islamicate and Persianate is crucial in capturing the social nuances of Mughal culture, for the Persianate culture of Mughal India was markedly different from both the Persian culture of Safavi Iran and the Persianate culture of Ottoman Turkey in that here Persianization did not necessarily correspond with Islamization. At the historical moment when Muhammad Shākir wrote—and for at least a century after that—Persianization had something, but not everything, to do with being Muslim, much as in contemporary South Asia Westernization has little to do with one’s religious background, but much to do with whether one is rural or urban, poor or middle-class. As we will soon see, two translators of Jáyasī’s Padmāvat into Persian—Ānand Rām Mukhliṣ and Lacchmi Rām Ībrahimbādī—were unmistakably Hindu.

It is thus that I have been careful to talk of a Persianate sensibility rather than a Muslim sensibility or a Muslim response to Hindi and the Hindi literary tradition. For example, we could say of Muḥammad Shākir that he was ‘a Muslim’, but if we say that he was ‘a Muslim reader of Padmāvat’ we imply, however slightly, that his response to Padmāvat Islamizes the text; and whereas it can be said to do so when he inserts a Ṣūfi biography, it doesn’t when he inserts the couplet by Ḥāfīẓ. Jáyasī’s Padmāvat is a Hindi text; as such it necessarily partakes of the Indic texture of Hindi lyric poetry; but it is also a Ṣūfi text, and its Ṣūfi readers and translators effected two types
of changes in its texture by bringing to it extra-textual echoes—they Islamized it and they Persianized it. 41 The specific moments when these changes were introduced and the specific narrative or structural elements which were chosen for deliberation, comment, translation and transformation reveal much about the ecology of the Persianate imagination in its Indic habitat.

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41 For a similar attempt at identifying the varying trajectories of these cultural processes in South Asia see Philip Wagoner’s excellent article on Islamicization of public and domestic dress styles at the Vijayanagar court. Much of my own thinking about the varieties of readerly and formal responses to Mughal literature was inspired by this article: Philip B. Wagoner, “‘Sultān among Hindu Kings’: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara,” Journal of Asian Studies 55.4 (November, 1996), pp. 851-881.
CHAPTER TWO

HINDI AS THE LANGUAGE OF TASTE

Phülenge is zabān men bhī gulzār-i ma’rifah
Yān main zamīn-i sh’er men yeh tukhm bo gayā

Here too will bloom the Rose of gnosis
now that in the soil of this idiom l’ve sown the seeds

Khvājah Mīr Dard

II.1 Conversionary Theories of Hindi in its Persianate Environment

How does one chart the course of the very prominent medieval genre of the Premākhyaṇa—romantic tales written by Ṣūfis in dialects of Hindi, and not, as one might expect, in Persian? It is not simply the choice of Hindi by Ṣūfis which defies conventional expectations, but also the hybrid narrative texture of the Premākhyaṇa. For example, Padmāvat of Muḥammad Jāyasī contains frequent intertextual references to Yogic cosmology, and in its subtext tells the story of the Rāmāyaṇa, while simultaneously plotting the narrative according to the martyrology of the famous Iraqi Ṣūfī Mansur al-Ḥallāj. But Jāyasī’s Hindi telling of the story of Princess Padmāvati did not
exhaust the narrative, which was subsequently refashioned in many Persian, as well as Urdu versions. One Persian version, the *Shamʻo Parvānah* was written in 1658 by the Mughal poet Rāzī who was also the governor of the city of Delhi under the reign of Aurangzeb. Although he was a member of the elite Persian-speaking community of Delhi Rāzī inserted Hindi couplets of his own composition in the largely Persian text of *Shama*. And lest we think that linguistic choices correspond neatly to religious identity there is yet another Persian retelling of *Padmāvat* to give us pause--this by the early eighteenth-century Rājpūt Hindu noble Rai Ānand Rām Mukhlīṣ, who composed not just a Persian retelling of the *Padmāvat*, but also Persian ghazals. Thus, if literary historians wish to discuss the totality of a narrative tradition like *Padmāvat* then they very soon find themselves stepping into the terrain of Persian, and eventually also Urdu. And what is true of the *Padmāvat* narrative tradition is also true of most North Indian Šūfi literature. It is only on the pages of Grierson’s survey of languages that Indian narrative traditions submit to the shackles of neat linguistic classification. Thus, the ecology of Hindi in Mughal India implies both Persian and Urdu--each defining the other, and even bleeding into the other.

When the picture is thus muddled a cluster of questions lay claim to the historian’s attention: why and when did an author like Rāzī choose to write in Hindi rather than in Persian, the expected language of literary and official discourse in his immediate elite environment? What were the occasions when a Persianized poet or hagiographer chose to have his subject speak Hindi, as opposed to Persian or Arabic, and what may this reveal about
the valorization and hierarchization of Hindi in its multi-lingual Mughal contexts? What, in other words, was the resonance of Hindi in its long period of co-existence with first Persian and then Urdu in the Mughal empire? And finally, to what extent do the Hindu nationalist paradigms of Hindu-Muslim relations hamper our efforts at reconstructing the literary contexts of medieval North India?

Before attempting answers to such questions let us focus our attention on the consensus of modern critics, for it is through the lens of their interpretations that Šūfi Hindi literature becomes accessible to us. Perhaps the single most frequently-consulted work on Hindi in its pre-modern Persianate contexts is Maulavi ‘Abd al-Ḥaq’s survey, Ṣūrdū kī iḥtidaī nashv o numā me Ṣuflīyā-yā kākām, whose very title--The Role of Eminent Šūfīs in the Cultivation of Early Urdu--betrayes the author’s admiration for the Indian Šūfīs. It also betrayes his haste in subsuming within the rubric of ‘Urdu’ the slippery jumble of North Indian vernacular dialects which forms the substance of his survey, but which bear little resemblance to the liberally-Persianized speech which we today call ‘Urdu’. Thus, I would argue that despite its title, Ṣūrdū kī iḥtidaī nashv o numā is as much a survey of early Hindi as of incipient Urdu. Without, for the moment, lingering on genealogies of linguistic classification, let us examine ‘Abd al-Ḥaq’s introductory remarks on Šūfīs in India, for they capture the basic axes of explanation which form the core of many subsequent discussions of the Šūfīs’ motivations in occasionally choosing Indian vernaculars over Persian:
The *maulavī* (religious scholar) drives everyone with the same stick. The Şūfi observes, however, the varying shades of peoples' natures and nurtures everyone according to his innate inclinations; in so doing he sometimes deviates from canon law (*shari'ah*); nor does he mind abandoning certain fundamental principles and legal tenets, for unlike the *maulavī*, the Şūfi is not a slave to the letter of the law, but is concerned, rather, with essential meanings (*ma'ni*). A true Şūfi is an expert in human psychology...and in comparison to the canon lawyers (*'ulama*) he has his hand on the pulse of the people; he explores the inner world (*dil tâoltâ ha’i*), and reaches, furthermore, the very depths of a person's heart....His foremost principle is to win over the hearts of the people, and in pursuit of this aim he does not let any superficial hurdle deter him, whether it be in the form of a legal objection or otherwise.

In India the Muslim Saints penetrated lofty mountain chains and lonely wastelands and....settled in such places where no one had even heard of 'Islam' and 'Muslims', and where everything was alien and contrary to their nature....however, the situation today is such that although hundreds of years have passed since the death of these saints, thousands of servants of God bow themselves before the tombs of these saints day and night...What brought this about? The thing is that the Şūfis had such power to sway peoples' sentiments (*dil ko khâncne kā sâmān*) as was not in the possession of either kings or legal scholars.

In order, however, to appeal to peoples' sentiments (*dil hâth lânā*) the first thing necessary is a commonality of language (*ham-zabâni*); it is only through shared language that an intellectual affinity (*ham-khaylî*) can arise. The hospice of the Şūfi used to be open to all...his was the open-court, as opposed to the elite-court of the king. People of all different social and religious communities (*qaum o millat*) used to come to the Şūfis without any discrimination, believing pilgrimage and association with the Şūfis to be the necessary means for the dispensation of a special power (*baraka*). In this there was no distinction between the elite and the commoner; in fact, the common people (*'avâm*) were more devoted to the Şūfis than the elite (*khâvas*). So, for the purpose of religious instruction (*talqîn*), Şūfis adopted various methods, and the foremost among these was learning the language of the region so that they might spread their message to the common people (*tā keh apnā*)
paigḥām ‘avām tak pahuncā saken). Therefore, with very few exceptions, all the Šūfīs who came to India, or were born in India, though they were learned and knowledgeable, spoke to the common people in their own language and instructed them in it.\(^1\)

We may well deem the edge of Ḥaq’s critical reasoning dulled by an overly adulatory attitude towards the Šūfīs, but his assessment does introduce us to several conceptual oppositions which conventionally structure discussions of the relationship between medieval Šūfī authors and their Hindi compositions. ‘Abd al-Ḥaq identifies the specialists in Islamic canon law—the maulavīs and ‘ulamā—as foils to the Šūfīs; and in this comparison the legists do not fare well: they are unyielding enforcers of the canon law (sharī‘ah) and as such ill-suited to the alien landscape of India; the Šūfīs, by contrast, deftly negotiate the cultural and dispositional variations of the common people (‘avām), to whom they were allegedly at pains to be especially accessible—though it meant adopting Indian vernaculars. It is in the Šūfīs’ alleged role as disseminators of Islam among the Hindu commoners (‘avām) that ‘Abd al-Ḥaq places the origin of Hindi—or early Urdu—literature in a Persianate environment. Thus, we may say that in ‘Abd al-Ḥaq’s estimation Hindi Šūfī literature was overwhelmingly missionary in intent. Hindi literature was the public face of the Šūfī—it faced out to the alien land in which the Šūfīs found themselves again and again in the course of their Indian venture. Ḥaq’s assertion of the special accessibility of the Šūfīs to the ‘avām and the adoption of Hindi as a consequence of this moral stance also

serves to surround the elite Ṣūfis and their Hindi compositions in the benign

glow of a liberal impulse.

A decade after the publication of ‘Abd al-Ḥaq’s survey Richard Eaton

presented a detailed explanation of the place of Hindi in its Persianate Ṣūfī

contexts.² In his monograph on the Deccani Ṣūfis of Bijapur Eaton sought to

elucidate the process by which Islam came to be accepted by ever larger

numbers of Indians, and the role of the Ṣūfis in the expansion of Islam. Eaton

began by assigning Ṣūfis the primary role as agents of Islamic expansion in

India. This presented a question: how was the mass of rural Hindus attracted
to the elite Persianized Ṣūfis who were often given to debating and disputing
abstruse theological issues? Not only was there an intellectual discrepancy
between the highly-educated Ṣūfis and the rural Hindu masses, but there
was also an intervening linguistic barrier for, being illiterate, the Hindus
knew no Persian. The Deccani Ṣūfis, Eaton reports, produced a rich body of
prose as well as verse in both Persian and Hindi. The verse compositions
were mostly in Deccani Hindi, while the prose works were exclusively in
Persian. Eaton notes that the prose texts are analytic, discursive tracts on Ṣūfī
theosophy and concludes that they were, therefore, intended for the inner
core of the Shaikh’s disciples, who were also members of the educated,
Persianized elite. Furthermore, the analytic content of the prose treatises
demanded their composition in Persian since Ṣūfī technical vocabulary was

² Eaton, Richard. “Ṣūfis as Literati,” in *The Ṣūfis of Bijapur: Social Roles of Ṣūfis in
arguments contained in the book appeared in Eaton’s earlier article: “Sufi Folk Literature and
derived from either Arabic or Persian. Hindi was not, therefore, adequate for the expression of theosophical speculation,\(^3\) which Eaton identifies as 'mysticism proper.'\(^4\)

In addition, however, to being theorists and theosophists, Şūfis were also spokesmen for Islam--especially in their overwhelmingly non-Muslim Indian environment. In their role as propagators of Islam, Hindi was indispensable to the Şūfis as a means of communicating with illiterate, rural Hindus unschooled in Persian and incapable of engaging complex discursive thought. The Şūfis intended their Hindi verse compositions for these rural masses. In other words, Eaton presents Hindi Şūfi poetry as an example of the elite Şūfis' concession to the simple sensibility of the Hindu commoners (\('avām\)). Viewed thus Hindi verse is on the one hand inadequate for expressing the core of Şūfi intellectual concerns but, on the other, indispensable for the communication of the rudiments of Islamic thought to the Hindu masses.

Thus far Eaton treads in the footsteps of 'Abd al-Ḥaq; however, his is a more ambitious argument, and it is in his attempt in locating more precisely the Hindu community of response to Hindi Şūfi verse that Eaton forges a new interpretive trail. The Hindi verses which the Bijapur Şūfis wrote in the

\(^3\)Here Eaton identifies classificatory tracts on "abstract system(s) of mystical stages (maqāmāt) and states (ḥāvāl, vajd) requiring an immense degree of intellectual and spiritual discipline," Eaton, (1974) p.118.

\(^4\)"We find that verse was generally conveyed in Dakhni and prose in Persian, and that the Dakhni works were thematically addressed to wider, commoner audiences while the Persian writings dealt more exclusively with mysticism proper and were generally intended for use by the author's fellow Şūfis. [emphasis mine]. Eaton, (1974) p. 141.
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were largely short songs celebrating such typically women's activities as milling (cakkī nāmā), weaving (carkhā nāmā) or singing lullabies to their children (lorī nāmā); they are, furthermore, often addressed to an unambiguously female listener or co-worker whom the speaker addresses while milling at the grindstone or weaving at the loom. Eaton proposes that such songs "appealed especially, probably exclusively, to women," for not only did they contain imagery particularly relevant to women's life experiences, but they could also be chanted to the rhythms of work. The songs were not only linguistically accessible, but also existentially meaningful to women who formed, according to Eaton, a very large part of a Sufi Shaikh's outer circle of followers because of his frequent associations with fertility.

In addition, however, to containing work and familial imagery the Sufi Hindi verses also skillfully wove in such rudimentary Islamic concepts as the profession of belief in a unitary God, the status of Muḥammad as the final prophet, and the succession of caliphs after Muḥammad. Thus, through the spread of Hindi folk songs, Eaton postulates, the Sufi authors addressed Hindu women who gradually became initiated into the basics of Islamic thought, and over the course of generations became Muslim.

In Eaton's explanation, as also in 'Abd al-Ḥaq's, Hindi is imagined as the instrument of outreach, though not necessarily conversion in the sense of

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5 For translations of several such songs see Eaton. (1974), pp. 122-23.

6 See also Schimmel's similar assessment of Hindi Sufi literature: "Sufis wanted to explain mysteries of divine love and divine grace to the people who flocked around them and who understood neither Arabic--language of the Quran and lawyer divines-- nor
a single dramatic moment of insight marking a formal entry into a new religious community. According to both commentators, however, the long-term, inter-generational consequence of Hindi compositions was to effect the conversion of non-Persianized, rural Hindus to Islam.

If Hindi Ṣūfi verses were indeed produced to facilitate preaching, we may say that their function was mediative, for they bridged the intellectual and linguistic gap between elite Muslim men and common Hindus—especially women. As such, Hindi verse in its Persianate Ṣūfi contexts is an essential part of da‘vah, the formal summons or invitation to join the community of Muslims (‘ummah); the force of the mediative theories of Hindi Ṣūfi literature is to imagine the Ṣūfi author primarily as a propagator of Islam engaged in a ceaseless negotiations with the surrounding community of non-Muslims.

For ‘Abd al-Ḥaq Hindi in its mediative role as an instrument of da‘vah is a measure of the flexible, liberal—even ‘democratic’—ethic of the Ṣūfi ministering especially to the commoners in preference to the elite. In Eaton’s explanation, however, Hindi emerges somewhat less favourably, for it is explained as being inadequate in expressing the full depth of Ṣūfi intellectual concerns and therefore, one might say, it is a distraction tolerated for the sake of communicating to rural Hindus the soundness of the Islamic revelation. But whether Hindi Ṣūfi verse is presented as the index of an ethically laudable moral stance, or an occasional detour from the highway of elite

Persian—language of poetry and historiography. Thus mystical leaders had to recur to the vernacular. They composed little songs for their followers, songs which condensed their teachings and which might also be used in mystical assemblies,” in “Influence of Sufism on Indo-Muslim Poetry,” in Anagogic Qualities of Literature, edited by Joseph Strelka (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 143.
intellectual concerns into the byways of simple folk poetry, our commentators concur on the direction of its appeal and reception within medieval society: it ‘flows’ from the ‘high’ ground of its elite origins into the lower reaches of the Hindu commoners. Hindi literature by Śūfis is, therefore, a literature for export—not meant for home-consumption within the elite Persianate community of its manufacture.

It is a distinguishing feature of conversational explanations that their proponents merely assert the image of the Śūfi-as-preacher-of-Islam without bothering to capture the highlights and shadows which might throw this portrait into finer relief. What, one is tempted to ask, were the precise forms and mechanisms of Śūfi outreach to Hindus, and did it always assume the same tone or proceed from the same sense of urgency and mission? It is perhaps the persuasive force of the Hindu nationalist image of a rapaciously expanding Islam that leads us to accept, without demands of clearer definition, the impressionistic portrait of the Śūfi as an agent of a Muslim outreach to the Hindu masses.

This portrait presumes, at least in part, a sense of urgency and anxiety among medieval Muslims about the presence of Islam in an overwhelmingly non-Muslim environment. Such a mood of Muslim unease is evoked quite vividly by ‘Abd al-Ḥaq in his pointed placement of the Muslim darvesh as a ‘pioneer’ in the far-flung outposts of the Indian subcontinent, beyond “high mountains and arid wastes where no one had even heard of ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslims’.” But a sense of numerical vulnerability and physical isolation upon which the Śūfi outreach to Hindus is predicated may speak far more to
late-colonial and post-colonial Muslim fears than medieval ones. My primary hesitation about both Eaton’s and ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s facile portrayal of the Ṣūf-ı-as-preacher is that it insufficiently imagines the possible range of self-definitions among pre-colonial Muslims living in a political situation radically different from our own, and responding to an intellectual milieu in which the ground for a demographically comparative self-scrutiny had not yet been prepared.

The British colonial project in India was quite self-consciously one of measuring, enumerating and quantifying the land as well as its inhabitants. A numerical objectification of the Indian population was ideologically consistent with the British definition of themselves as just rulers capable of dealing fairly with the incredible variety of Indian subjects by guaranteeing them equal access to government funds or bureaucratic appointments.7 But in discussing the Mughal subject—whether Hindu or Muslim, elite or rural—we have to imagine a world in which no national or even local census had as yet taken place, and so the relative numbers of Muslims vis-a-vis Hindus could not be ascertained; nor, I believe, did they need to be ascertained with quite the same precision, for the Mughal political system was not a representative democracy in which sheer numbers could translate into political clout.

7 For the considerable literature on this topic see Arjun Appadurai, “Number in the Colonial Imagination,” in Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament,” edited by Carol Breckenridge and Peter Van Der Veer, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 314-341.
through such administrative policies as the setting and granting of quotas for specific castes or religious communities.\footnote{For a discussion of the Indian response to the ethnographic objectification made possible by the census, and the almost immediate Indian manipulation of the new categories of social identity resulting from the census see Bernard Cohn, “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia,” in An Anthropologist Among Historians and Other Essays (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), especially pp. 248-9 where Cohn discusses the chagrin of the elite Bengali Muslims at having been classified as converts from lower caste Hindus and tribals.}

When discussing such a political and cultural situation we have to ask ourselves whether its members would have scrutinized themselves in quite as demographically comparative a way? Would the issue of the expansion of Islam through Hindu conversions have had such a breathless urgency for the elite Muslims of pre-modern India? Should we not consider the possibility that the Muslim presence in India began to seem especially threatening to Hindus--and precarious to Muslims--as a result of the numerical self-scrutiny made possible by such objectifying colonial projects as the census of 1871 and the subsequent series of Imperial Gazeteers begun in the 1890's and continued well into the twentieth-century?

One unexpected revelation of the national census was that as many as 22.8 percent of the inhabitants of British India were found to be Muslim--far too many, in other words, to be accounted for by immigration from Central Asia or Iran. It was in such a climate of increasing reliance on numerical and demographic objectification, suggests Peter Hardy in his study of typologies
of Hindu conversion, that “the convert of indigenous stock to Islam obtained full recognition” for the very first time in the Indian political imagination.\(^9\)

A survey of the considerable body of pre-colonial Şūfi hagiographic writings reveals, however, scant recognition of Hindus—either as a significant body of non-believers outnumbering the Muslim community, or as a significant pool of outsiders ready to augment the Muslim community through conversions. The malfūz tradition of Şūfi hagiographies, which has its beginnings in fourteenth-century biographies of the Chishti Saints of Delhi,\(^10\) shows several axes of concern which crystallize subsequently into tropes, but a concern with preaching to Hindus finds scant mention. The early malfūz writers are greatly interested in establishing the credentials of their Şūfi masters by emphasizing his position as a special recipient of divine grace. This was done in number of ways: a Shaikh may be shown to be directly descended from the prophet or his companions and thus in the direct line of inspiration and reception; or he may prove himself intellectually by discoursing on academic and theological questions, thereby demonstrating his command of the Islamic intellectual and legal traditions; but within the logic of Şūfi mystical tradition the two most frequent ‘proofs’ of his sanctity

\(^9\)Peter Hardy, “Modern European and Muslim Explanations of Conversion to Islam in South Asia: A Preliminary Survey of the Literature,” in *Conversion to Islam*, edited by Nehemiah Levtzion (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1979), 68-97. This is by far the best overview of the typologies of conversion to Islam in South Asia.

\(^10\)For a discussion of the malfūz tradition see Bruce Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute: Sufi Literature in Pre-Mughal India* (Teheran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978).
were his resolve for disciplined withdrawal from the world (tark-i duniyā) and his responsiveness to ecstasy (ḥāl or vajd).

In his special insistence for withdrawal from the world the Shiākh displayed the exemplary virtue of voluntary poverty (faqr) as well as independence from worldly entanglements; thus, a frequent trope in the malfūz tradition is the Śūfi avoidance of a royal visitor who tries to lure or threaten the Shiākh into a dependent relationship, often in the form of a lucrative bureaucratic appointment.

In his natural inclination to ecstasy the Śūfi Shiākh showed himself to be the possessor of a ‘higher’ knowledge not accessible to everyone, least of all to persons of conventionally high status such as the legal-scholar (ʿālim) or the king; furthermore, since ecstasy was often induced by hearing poetic verse recited or sung, the Shiākh’s inclination to ecstasy also demonstrated his sensitivity to aesthetic matters. Thus, in the hagiographic imagination of a malfūz author/devotee a Śūfi Shiākh may prove himself genealogically, intellectually, morally or esthetically; but in this list of credentials one seldom sees his ability to reach out to Hindus as a recurrent trope.

The work of Yohanan Friedman on the Mughal Śūfi Ahmad Sarhindī (d. 1624) is suggestive of the kind of outreach a Śūfi might have embarked upon in his Indian environment. Sarhindī belonged to a strict reformist order of Naqshbandī Śūfīs at a juncture when the Naqshbandīs had just

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established their order in India after having arrived from Central Asia a few years before the turn of the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{12} If we accept the portrait of the Şūfī as an active preacher we might expect to see Sarhindī engaged in vigorous efforts to win over Hindus to Islam in general and to the Naqshbandīs in particular at this crucial initial stage of his fledgling order; however, Friedman reports that of the more than five-hundred letters of Sarhindī there is only one addressed to a Hindu who, significantly, approached the Shaikh with a desire to be admitted into his order. Let us intercept Sarhindī in his response to Hirday Rām. He begins on a discouraging note:

Your two letters reached me, and from both we understand your fondness for the Şūfīs and your desire to seek a refuge in this lofty community. What a divine grace it is when someone is granted this good fortune; secondly: I fulfill my obligation to guide (shart-i balagh) Whether you take my advice, or are irked by it.

You should know and be aware that my protector (parvardagār) and yours—in fact, the protector of the entire creation, whether heavenly or terrestrial, small or big—is one and, furthermore, is incomparable (be cūn o cegunah), free of likeness and image, and is far removed from both form and analogy. Fatherhood and sonhood is impossible in the case of that exalted being; what power have resemblance and similitude in his presence? The dilution of his unity and any idea of his incarnation (hulūl) is a disgrace to his glory...

Rām and Krśna and the likes of them, who are the deities of the Indians/Hindus (ālihā-ye hunūd) are the least of His creations: they are born ofmothers and fathers; Rām is the son of Jsrath (sic) and the brother of Lakhman and the husband of Sītā; when Rām could not look after his ownwife what help could he possibly offer others? You ought to

use your intelligence and not persist in blind devotion to
them. It is a great disgrace that one should invoke the
protector of all created things by the name of Rām or Krshna;
it is as though one invoked a glorious king by the name of a
lowly street-sweeper. Believing Rām and Rahim to be one
proceeds from a great lack of intelligence—the creator is not
the same as the creation, the incomparable does not fuse
with that which is comparable...

Our prophets...encouraged people to pray to the
creator and forbade them to pray to others; they knew
themselves to be helpless devotees, and were in awe of his
majesty and greatness. The deities of the Hindus/Indians,
however, encouraged people to pray to them and asserted
themselves to be gods; although they are proponents of the
existence of a single Protector, inspite of this they declared
him to be incarnate in themselves, and so they summon
people to pray to them, causing others to call them ‘deities’
and thus to fall into that which is forbidden. By means of the
claim that a deity is not forbidden anything, and that it may
do or possess anything it wishes in all of creation, they have
come to hold and promote corrupt notions—"they have gone
astray, and have led others astray."

In contradistinction to this the Prophets [of Islam]
have completely restrained themselves from doing what is
forbidden to people at large; they call themselves humans
(bashar), like the rest of humanity.

And here, just in case the message was not yet clear, Sarhindī adds the final
flourish in the form of a verse fragment quoted from a well-known ghazal by,
once again, Hāfiz: Just look, how the roads diverge! Where the one, and where
the other (ba-bīn tafāvat-i rah az kojāst tā bah kojā). 13

13 The Persian text of the letter is reproduced in Selected letters of Shaikh Ahmad
Sirhindī (Karachi: Iqbal Academy of Pakistan, 1968), 212-3. The full verse with which the
letter ends is: Šalāh-kār kojā, o man-i kharāb kojā; bah-bī tafāvat-i rah, az kojāst tā bah-kojā.
Where is the pious one, and where am I the reprobate? Just look: where the one and where
the other. Hāfiz Shirāzi, Divān, ghazal #2.
Is this the outreach of a Muslim eager to gain converts among the Hindus? The Shaikh considered fulfilled his obligation to preach (*shart-i balāgh*) by pointing out in the bluntest possible terms to the Hindu that their respective paths were incompatible and so Hirday Rām’s presence in his circle of followers would be unwelcome. Except for this one anomalous letter the rest of Sarhindī’s correspondence was addressed to three audiences: his inner circle of disciples including his sons, Muslim nobles in the Mughal bureaucracy, and Emperor Jahāngīr himself. In his considerable correspondence with his contemporaries Sarhindī shows no desire to communicate with Hindus—not even with that substantial population of Hindus who knew Persian fluently because they were in the employ of a Persianate bureaucracy.

Of course, one instance of a rebuff to a potential Hindu convert does not establish the general outlines of the Şūfi ‘policy’ on outreach to Hindus; my point in dwelling on Sarhindī’s letter to Hirday Rām is to juxtapose it with the rest of his correspondence and so to suggest that in presenting the Indian Şūfi as a preacher to Hindus we may be isolating for special scrutiny what was only an infinitesimally small part of a Şūfi’s understanding of his own role as a Muslim in his Indian environment; in this selective viewing we animate pre-colonial subjects with concerns and fears which compel Indian Muslim and Hindu communities today as a result of the new demographic social knowledge made possible through the colonial experience.

Is it not a distinct possibility that in viewing Hindi Şūfi literature as an index of the Muslim anxiety about Islam in India and the resultant eagerness
to preach to Hindus, Eaton and ‘Abd al-Ḥaq are both moving within the orbit of a question which has held the Indian national imagination in its thrall since the late nineteenth century? The question involves the presence of Islam in India as a problem to be explained: how might we account for the spectacular success of Islam, its ability to win so many converts in India despite its radically un-Indian texture--a middle-eastern origin, a late arrival in the subcontinent and, above all, a linguistic dependence on Arabic and Persian? As such the question is foundational for both India and Pakistan as separate nations with distinct religious profiles. In India the question echoes very loudly indeed in the political imagination of the increasingly conservative Hindu majority trying to force a national unity by presenting Islam as a historically persistent internal threat to the integrity of a Hindu nation.

The question of Islamic success in the sub-continent has traditionally been answered in a number of ways; one conventional answer points to Islam as a religion of the sword and thus locates Islamic success in a history of coercive conversions among Hindus. This view may be increasingly suspect in academic circles, but the consensus of the popular Hindu imagination is quite otherwise--here theories of conversion by force have not only met favourable reception, but have been actively used by Hindu nationalists to redress a ‘history’ of Muslim aggressions. Needless to say, the Indian Muslim reaction to the question and its conventional answer is one of alarm. If in such a climate of growing antipathy to Muslims the Islamic ‘success’ in India can be shown to have been achieved by means other than coercion then Islam
appears in a generally more favourable light and Muslims as less problematic on the national stage.

It is here, in the logic of a defensive Muslim response to the popular narrative of conversion by force, that the Ṣūfī finds a useful niche as the peaceful disseminator of Islam. It is not an accident that Maulavi ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq’s Ṣūfī authors minister gently and even ‘democratically’ to the Hindu commoners, winning their hearts by talking to them in their own language. The role of the Ṣūfī as a gentle preacher and disseminator of Islam is largely unquestioned for it is a handy counter-narrative to the long and embarrassing list of alleged Islamic conquerers (ghāzī) who crowd the Indian imagination.

But as we see in Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindī’s correspondence, outreach to Hindus seems to have occupied very little of his efforts. When presented, therefore, with explanations of Hindi Ṣūfī literature as an instrument of outreach and conversion we ought to be suspicious, for the view rests on the inflexible paradigm of Islam and Hinduism as two discrete and irreconcilable forces locked in a historical battle for numerical and political ascendancy. Eaton’s and ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq’s view is both a variation and a refinement of this pejorative stereotype, since in their interpretation the instrument of Islamic expansion is not the sword but, rather, Hindi poetry--one catches more flies with honey than with vinegar. Presented thus Ṣūfī Hindi authors become instruments of a ruthless Islam as it marches juggernaut-like upon a passive Hindu majority. Is it possible to place Hindi Ṣūfī compositions and their authors within a broader range of aesthetic, political and theological concerns
than is allowed by the logic of contemporary Hindu fears of a Muslim minority?

Only recently have theories of the mediative and conversionary role of Hindi Şūfī literature begun to be challenged. Although Hindi poetry by Şūfīs is not the principal subject of Carl Ernst’s research on the Chishti Şūfīs of Khuldabad, he nevertheless grapples with the “vexed question of poetry in Indian vernaculars” by Şūfī authors.14 Unlike the Bijapur Chishtiś, the somewhat earlier Khuldabad Chishtiś mostly wrote in Persian.15 Hindi in the Khuldabad texts appears in the form of isolated couplets (dohrās) punctuating lengthy Persian hagiographies (malfūzāt). In this overwhelmingly Persian textual environment Hindi couplets act as epigrammatic ‘clinching devices’ providing illustrations or contrasts to a speaker’s argument. For example, during a conversation on self-deception and complacency the Saint Zayn al-Dīn Shirāzī quotes a Hindi couplet which warns against mistaking mere external signs, like ashes and forehead marks commonly worn by yogīs, as indicative of an inner perfection.16 By thus choosing to end his argument through the use of a Hindi couplet the Şūfī speaker critiques Shaivite yogīs—in his imagination paragons of hypocrisy—in


15 The majority of texts discussed by Ernst were compiled in the middle of the fourteenth-century, and were authored by the successors of the Chishti Saint Burhānuddīn Gharīb (d. 1337).

16 Mir Ḥasan, Hidayat al-qulub, compiled between 1344 and 1367; cited in Ernst, p.167.
the very language they presumably spoke. In such a passage Hindi might be said to sharpen the rhetorical thrust of the argument by effecting a union between content and linguistic form.

In another example from a local hagiography the author Rukn al-Dīn Kashani has Saint Burḥānuddīn Gharib begin a verse in Hindi only to end it in Arabic by embedding within it a fragment from the Qur'an. We learn, furthermore, that the occasion for the recitation of this Hindi verse was the discussion and explication of yet another passage from the Qur'an.\textsuperscript{17} In such macaronic verses Hindi and Arabic exist in so tight an embrace as to be inextricable; however, the larger social significance of such linguistic symbiosis is to suggest that far from being directed at a mass of simple, rural Hindus Hindi verses were often quite unambiguously directed at an audience fluent enough in the Islamic tradition to be able to recognize intertextual Arabic references in the body of a Persian text; but for our purposes it is crucial to note that, though Muslim, this audience was at the same time “open to having the tradition’s nuances explored through Indian imagery;”\textsuperscript{18} and the overall effect of this exploration of nuances was to add “an Indian sensibility that modulated the quality of the Islamic material.” Here Hindi verse was not the vehicle for preaching Islam to non-Muslims but, rather, a means of making Islam more meaningful to those Indian Muslims already steeped in Qur’anic traditions.

\textsuperscript{17}Rukn al-Dīn Kashani, \textit{Nafais al-anfas}, compiled between 1331 and 1337; cited in Ernst, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 167.
Through the example of Hindi verses used in contexts presuming a deep familiarity with Islamic themes, Ernst pertinently suggests that mediative and conversionary theories of Hindi need revision. He concludes by suggesting that “the purpose of this kind of poetry seems rather to be that of reinforcing the subject at hand by means of a powerful literary tool that had great appeal to an audience of Indian Šūfis,” and that “the explanation of the Šūfī interest in Indian literature may turn out to be fairly simple, on the aesthetic level. The Šūfīs used Indian poetry because they liked it, and they interpreted it in terms of their own Šūfī teachings.”

By beginning to imagine the Šūfī author as more than just a missionary responding to the exigencies of preaching Ernst takes a significant step away from mediative theories of the use of Hindi. If we take Ernst’s brief conclusions as signposts in our own quest for a better understanding of the relationship between Hindi and Persian we find ourselves traversing a substantially more varied terrain than that covered by the traditional mediative theorists. We become conscious of the need to penetrate more fully the intellectual universe of the Šūfī authors, and within this universe to locate the logic of aesthetic and rhetorical considerations; but we are also forced to ask ourselves if it is merely enough to state that Šūfī authors used Hindi because of its aesthetic appeal. Is it possible to be more precise by attempting to define that range of values which made Hindi attractive to Šūfī authors? Might we lay our finger on those shades of meaning which were thrown into

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19 Ibid., 168.
higher relief through the use of Hindi, so that it became a means for exploring the nuances of the Islamic tradition? And if in following the signposts left by Ernst, Eaton and ‘Abd al-Ḥaq we find ourselves led ever deeper into the terrain of medieval Ṣūfī literary communities, then we might also pause to consider the other landscapes to which these signposts will not point the way—for each of the three authors leaves untouched the uses of Hindi in its non-Ṣūfī contexts. What, we might ask, constituted the aesthetic appeal of Hindi in its courtly environment, for it is here that we find another significant corpus of Hindi literature by Persianate authors. In other words, what are the inner modifications of the literary field of Hindi in its Persianate Mughal ecology? Such is the cluster of questions both provoked and left unanswered by Ernst.

II.2 Languages and Emotional Registers:
Farsiyyat Defined

The quest for the role and meaning of Hindi in the Mughal cultural landscape is thwarted at the very outset by a lack of clear road signs, for the Persianate Ṣūfī and courtly authors who produced much writing in Hindi seldom felt the need to reflect self-consciously on their linguistic choice. We are forced, therefore, to approach Hindi 'negatively'—by recognizing what it did not connote, and naming the literary niche it did not fill; approached thus, its profile emerges in somewhat the same way as a painter shading the
‘negative space’ around a form gradually reveals its contours, though not its inner modulations.

In the Persianate Muḥgal community the most immediate negative space containing the shape of Hindi was represented initially by Persian and then, from about the middle of the eighteenth century, Urdu. Let us claim one small corner of this negative space by examining a literary attitude as it emerges in Mirzā Rusvā’s great nineteenth-century novel, Umrāo Jān Ada. This is, of course, quite distant in time from the Muḥgal era but to the extent that the Urdu culture of North India was the direct heir to the Muḥghals, it might be profitable to begin here in search of a literary attitude towards language and then see if we can trace it back in time to the eighteenth century.

Mirzā Muḥammad Hadi Rusvā was born in 1857, the very year when the old Persianate culture of Lucknow—a direct and self-conscious heir to imperial Muḥgal tastes—was finally dealt a death blow by the British. It is on the ruins of this old order that Rusvā cast a wistful glance in his novel Umrāo Jān Ada.²⁰ The novel brilliantly captures the tenor of late Muḥgal society (it is set mostly in the pre-mutiny era) through vignettes of her eventful life which the courtesan Umrāo Jān remembers and recounts at the urging of her old acquaintance, the author himself. In the opening scene of the novel we come upon Rusvā as he has a chance meeting with Umrāo and invites her to join his circle of male friends sitting in an informal literary gathering (mushāʾirah)

exchanging Urdu ghazals. Umrāo demurs at first, for she will be the only woman in a gathering of highly literate men, and so is afraid of appearing immodest (be-takalluf); we sense, however, that an unstated reason for her reticence is that among the men present may be previous lovers or clients. Two things detain us in Umrāo’s introduction to the circle of the male literati: the way in which she eventually finds recognition by the most critical of the male poets, and the manner in which the author establishes Umrāo’s ‘credentials’ so that the reader is obliged to accept her not just as an intriguing ex-prostitute, but as the most distinguished member of the male gathering. Rusvā’s ‘proofs’ of Umrāo’s credentials and his depiction of the reactions of the male literati (adīb) reveal much about the relative position of Persian, Urdu and Hindi, as well as the various poetic expressions possible in each.

In her reticence at accepting Rusvā’s invitation Umrāo had quite astutely sensed the possibility of hostile reactions from the men. Rusvā, however, had assured her of a polite reception and tried to smooth her way by announcing her excellence as both a singer and a poet; thus, by the time she finally made her entrance the men were on their best behaviour and eager to hear her verse; she began by reciting a couplet she had written years ago:

\begin{quote}
Ka‘be me jā ke bhūl gayā rāh dair kī
īmān bac gayā mere maulā ne khair kī
\end{quote}

\footnote{Ibid., 19.}
Going to the Ka’ba I forgot the way to the church
my faith was saved--thanks to God’s grace

Upon hearing this one of the male poets, a certain Khān Şāḥab, couldn’t resist a jab. He immediately pounced on Umrāo, asking, “What is this ‘I forgot’?”--thus singleing out for attention the masculine verb form: bhūl gayā. In the Urdu ghazal the use of the masculine verbs and the resultant masculine narrative persona is a perfectly normal convention, since the the genre avoids gender specificity by using only masculine verbal forms to cover all references to the speaker and the addressee; thus, for example, even a female poet like Umrāo would conventionally be expected to assume a grammatically masculine persona by using masculine verb forms in the ghazal. Similarly, the addressee--usually the beloved--is also addressed or alluded to in the masculine--even when the dramatic context makes it quite clear that she is, in fact, a woman. In using the masculine form ‘bhūl gayā’--rather than the feminine ‘bhūl gayī’--Umrāo was following the usual convention. Khān Şāḥab’s pointed question about her choice of words served, therefore, to emphasize the disjunction between the male persona in the verse and its obviously female author. The sly innocence with which it was asked further served to draw attention to Umrāo’s presence as the only female in a male gathering.

But in Umrao Khān Şāḥab had more than met his match. Quick to grasp the hostile tone of this question Umrāo shot back at him saying: “So, do you imagine I talk in rekhtī when I write poetry?” Rekhtī was a very select
sub-genre of Urdu poetry dating to the mid-eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{22} It differed most conspicuously from the ghazal in that the rekhtī poet donned an unambiguously feminine persona by pointedly using female verbal forms as well as a specialized vocabulary of curse-words used only by women. In its deliberate defiance of the convention of the male persona rekhtī often served the purpose of introducing a comic relief in a mushā‘irah; thus, a male poet talking unconventionally in a female voice might embellish his speech with feminine gestures, drawing smiles from his fellow-participants. Rekhtī poetry may have been an accepted, and even expected, part of a mushā‘irah, but it was not considered a vehicle for serious sentiments.\textsuperscript{23} It was good for a laugh but not good enough to establish a poet’s reputation by itself. Thus, although Urdu poets wrote in rekhtī from the very beginning of the tradition of Urdu poetry in mid-eighteenth century, they did so sparingly; and they always did so from a safe position as a man.

By implying that Umrāo might simply talk as a woman that she was Khān Sāhab not only drew attention to her anomalous presence in a male gathering but also hinted that she might, as a woman, limit herself to light verse for the entertainment of the men present. The taunt was all the sharper


\textsuperscript{23} In fact, from the colonial era and up to the present rekhtī has come to be associated with moral laxity and verbosity, a cluster of literary attitudes for which Ali Zaidi himself provides a very clear example by characterizing rekhtī as “catering for those who sought decadent pleasure.” Zaidi, p. 137.
for Umrāo and Ḵhān Šāḥab were presumably unacquainted and thus Ḵhān Šāḥab should not have taken this liberty with her. As Umrāo’s benefactor and host, Rusvā was bound by the rules of courtesy (adab) to intervene, which he did by telling Ḵhān Šāḥab to stop running the mood of the gathering by being a literalist (muḥaqiq).

At this point in the novel both the reader and Ḵhān Šāḥab find themselves on roughly the same ground: both have heard the promise of Umrāo’s excellence, but the proof is yet to be presented. For all we know, and for all Ḵhān Šāḥab knows, Umrāo is simply another versifier—not in itself a particularly distinguishing mark in the Indo-Muslim society where any educated person was expected to compose verse; but as Umrāo proceeds confidently to recite her poetry despite Ḵhān Šāḥab’s harangue we notice a change in his attitude, until a few couplets later he can no longer contain himself and exclaims in admiration: “Kyā acchā kahā hai, fārsiyat tapak rahī hai!”

“wonderfully composed, it is simply dripping with Persianness.” (fārsiyat)

It is not simply Umrāo’s ability to write poetry but, more significantly, the Persianized texture of her verse that ultimately gains her recognition in the male world. Unlike the speech of women, and especially domestic women, her speech is mufarras, or Persianized—and herein lies its power to surprise as well as command respect. That Persian is the catalyst in her eventual acceptance is made clear by Ḵhān Šāḥab’s candid and pointed

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24 Ibid., 21.
appreciation of the fārsīyat inherent in her verse. And it is fārsīyat which 
Umrāo wears as a shield against the slings of male censure. Khān Sāḥab’s 
comment reveals that fārsīyat, or Persianness, was a synonym for refinement 
and gravity of sentiment.

But if fārsīyat connoted all of this, rekhtī emphatically did not: Rusvā’s 
description of the sequence of Khān Sāḥab’s reactions makes this contrast quite 
explicit. And it is in this contrast between fārsīyat and rekhtī that we begin to 
spy the blurred outlines of a hierarchy of literary attitudes—not just towards 
language and literary refinement, but also towards gender and the narrative 
personae permitted the poet in late Muḥgal society. First, we see that an 
explicitly feminine voice and an unambiguously feminine persona connoted 
levity and ‘lightness’—hence the damming imputation of rekhtī and Umrāo’s 
prompt rebuttal to it. The contrast between the feminine and masculine 
voices of rekhtī and Fārsī depends on the peculiar grammatical structure of 
Persian which—unlike both Urdu and the Hindi dialects—lacks grammatically 
gendered nouns, verbs or adjectives; as a result, the poet writing in Persian 
can easily avoid gender specificity. In Urdu and in Hindi dialects, however, 
such an erasure of gender is impossible. Thus, the fārsīyat which in Khān 
Sāḥab’s view redeemed Umrāo’s verse was not just a synonym for gravity 
and refinement. It also carried a strong aura of masculinity.

Let us retain the connection Rusvā draws between fārsīyat and 
masculinity, for I will return to this theme in the next chapter when talking of 
Hindi. For the moment, however, let us simply recognize in Khān Sāḥab’s 
growing admiration of Umrāo’s poetry a literary attitude which equated
‘Persianness’ with the refinement and gravity of sentiment deemed essential among the accomplishments of an adib—an educated, urbane member of a literary gathering.

Umrao’s unfolding account, however, reveals more than just an association of Farsi and literary taste. Farsiyyat is further associated with moral perfection and ethical discernment arrived at by a process of formal schooling. This series of associations is made later in the novel when Umrao tells Rusvā the rest of her life story since the days he last knew her as a courtesan.

The biggest change between then and now is that Umrao is no longer a courtesan; this change, however, is not simply caused by age. Umrao has, she confesses, undergone a change of heart and mind, and she traces this inner turning-point precisely to her re-discovery of a Persian classic which she had been trained to read as a teenager. The text is Gulistān of Sa‘dī, a thirteenth-century classic of didactic literature used frequently by the Mughals for teaching both Persian and ethics to students. At first, claims Umrao, she found Gulistān difficult when she picked it up casually in her middle age; but by persisting she arrived at the point where her Persian training as a teenager came flooding back to her and she could read it for pleasure; and now, she claims, she began to notice an inner transformation which led her to her present state as a dignified recluse. But it is noteworthy that her recollection of Gulistān becomes simultaneously an occasion for an incredibly poignant reflection on the process of formal education at the feet of the erudite, sometimes strict and always impeccably dressed maulavī who taught her the
language. And as she describes the maulavī’s pressed shervani and polished wooden walking stick with a brass handle, and silver beard trimmed to perfection she says: “kyā suthrā mażāq thā”, “he had such impeccable taste.” Thus, we may say that for Umrāo a formal Persian education was inextricably associated with restrained elegance, especially in the literary arts, and it led to a capacity for discernment essential to living a dignified life. In a word, Umrāo associated a Persian education with ‘ilm--one of the several modalities of knowledge in the vocabulary of Indo-Persian culture. ‘ilm denotes factual, rational and analytic knowledge arrived at by a conscious, and planned process of schooling. As such ‘ilm contrasts with ma‘rifah, or gnostic knowledge acquired through spiritual discipline and the guidance of a Śūfi Shaikh, or master. Let us keep in mind the opposition of ‘ilm and ma‘rifah, for it forms a major component of my argument later in the essay.

II.3 Anand Rām Mukhlig: Hindi Arrayed in Persian Finery

The association of Persian and Hindi emerges considerably more clearly as we move back in time to yet another vignette--this from the life of Rai Ānand Rām (1699-1751). The son of a wealthy Hindu noble from

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Lahore, Ānand Rām moved to Delhi, and on the basis of his command of Persian found employment as the secretary and commissary (vakīl) of the royal minister ‘Itamād al-Daulah. As befit a man of letters, Ānand Rām signaled his entry into this world by adopting a Persian pen-name--‘Mukhlīs’, meaning ‘sincere.’ Mukhlīs’ was not an especially unusual career, for a growing number of Hindu *khattrīs* and *kāyasthas* were employed by the Mughal bureaucracy, and at least in their public and professional lives, were fully Persianized. Like many other Hindus active in the upper echelons of Mughal society Mukhlīs too composed poetry in Persian, thus filling out the expected ‘profile’ of an educated, urbane Mughal.⁶⁶

Mukhlīs’ linguistic talents and inclinations, however, led him rather deeper into the core of the Persianate intellectual circles of Delhi in the early eighteenth century. As a budding poet Mukhlīs sought out the very best guidance Delhi could offer, choosing Mirzā ‘Abd-al Qādir ‘Bedil’, the most celebrated member of the Delhi poetic community, to emend his poetry. When in 1719 the poet-lexicographer Siraj al-Dīn Kħān ‘Arzū’ moved to Delhi Mukhlīs struck up a friendship with him; this time, however, the relationship was reversed, for Mukhlīs acted as Arzū’s benefactor and intercessor with the Mughal court.⁷⁷

Lasting till Mukhlīs’ death in 1751, this friendship landed him in the thick of a literary controversy raging in the high Persianate circles of

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eighteenth century Delhi. The issue at stake was the use of Hindi words in Persian verse. Sayyad ʿAbd Allah reports that the opponents of the use of Hindi argued that it was contrary to the rules of rhetorical elegance (faṣaḥat), while its proponents, among whom Arzu seems to have been particularly vocal, pointed to the Turkish lexical component of Persian, arguing that if Turkish did not taint Persian then why should Hindi? **28**

In his compendium of Persian idioms, *Mirāt al-istilāh* (*Mirror of Technical Terms*) Mukhlīṣ also entered the fray by stating pointedly: “it is the belief of some colleagues that the importation of Hindi words in Persian verse is not proper (durust). Such introductions present problems for both beginners and nobles (Khānān o mubtadiyān); however, those who are confident and talented are free (mukhtār) to do as they please.” **29** It was not only a direct statement of his position, but also a pot-shot at the elite of Delhi (khānān) who found Hindi irksome in Persian verse, and who now found themselves lumped in with the same category as ‘beginners’, in sharp contrast to ‘those who are confident and talented’ in matters of linguistic usage. I will return in the fourth chapter to the social dynamics of this linguistic controversy and the larger implications of Mukhlīṣ’ jab at the elite (khānān), for it defines a significant feature of the Muḥgal literary community; for now, however, let us keep Mukhlīṣ’ generally ‘liberal’ views

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about Hindi in mind as we visit him on a sleepless night when he heard and resolved to translate a Hindi tale.

In 1739 Mukhlīṣ completed a Persian prose translation of *Padmāvat*. In its introduction he recounts how he came to hear the story and to be moved by it. It happened one night when Ānand Rām had gone out to visit the annual fair (*chhadī*) of the legendary Šūfī Shāh Madār in the company of some close friends, including Ārzū and the poet Maʿnī Yāb Ḵān Shāʿir. Maybe because of the general din at the fair, or because of constant interruptions from passersby, Mukhlīṣ could not sleep and thus:

I said to my Deccani servant, who is not entirely unacquainted with my moods, that he should tell me a tale, so that perhaps in this way my eyes would be lulled to sleep, and forgetfulness overtake me; and he told this colourful tale that Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī, author of the Hindi *Padmāvat*, had written entirely in the Eastern dialect—as though it were an Eastern melody brimming over with pain (*bah zabān-i pūrabī sar tā sar cū pardin ye pūrabī labrez-i dard nigāshthā*). Jāyasī had based its wording on uncommon ideas and rare metaphors; however since the work contains the bewitchments and marvels of love it compels the heart to feel pain. And I said to myself: ‘if this Hindi Beloved were to be displayed in the robes of a Persian writer (*dar libās-i qalamkār-i fārsī jalvah dādah*), then it is possible that this work of art might appear elegant/ permissible in the estimation of the people of taste (*dar naẓar-i ahl-i žauq in fān mustahasan numāyad*). Therefore, this pen (of mine) which attempts such a wide variety of things, laid the foundations of this literary project and, having completed it within the span of a week, called it *Hangāmah-ye ‘ishq*—The Clamour of Love.”

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For his retelling Mukhlīş chose a sartorial metaphor. Jáyasī’s Hindi tale became transformed, through an act of synecdochic association, into its central character, Princess Padmāvatī. The issue now was the formal presentation of this Hindi beloved ‘in the rough’, to the people of literary taste (ahl-i żauq). For her presentation to the them, by implication her lovers, Hindi needed a change of clothes, and these were fashioned by Mukhlīş as he reclothed in Persian finery the beloved he felt to be unpresentable in her Hindi garb. Here Hindi is defined by opposition: if Persian robes refine the Hindi beloved, making her fit for the eyes of the literati, then Hindi by implication lacks polish, elegance and taste. It is significant that even for a man of Mukhlīş’ convictions about the permissibility of the importation of Hindi words in Persian verse a Hindi composition remained too inelegant for presentation to his immediate audience of Persianate poets like Arzū.

But that is not the end of the matter, for lurking in Mukhlīş’ account we sense the presence of yet another, somewhat complimentary, attitude towards Hindi, and especially towards its eastern dialect which he highlights for comment. It is true that Mukhlīş deemed Hindi in need of a change of clothes, but it is also true that he did not feel the need to transform her substance. We see, instead, that Mukhlīş found the Hindi Padmāvat especially effective in moving the emotions--‘it compels the heart to feel pain’. And one reason for this compulsion was that in its eastern dialect Mukhlīş heard the strains of ‘an eastern melody brimming over with pain.’
In his imprecise definition of 'an eastern dialect' Mukhlis is the distanced view of an urbane Panjabi peering east from the cosmopolis of Delhi in an attempt at locating Jāyasī's dialect somewhere over the curve of the horizon. Distance blurs detail, and so Jāyasī's language is simply called an 'eastern dialect.' But imprecise though he was about its geographic location Mukhlis expressed quite specifically its emotional effects—it inclined his heart to feel pain, as does music. The eastern dialect of Hindi, therefore, seems to have carried definite associations of musicality, rhythm and cadence. In its eastern Hindi garb Padmāvat may have lacked polish, but it was especially effective in moving the sensitive heart to feel the ennobling emotion of pain, without which, in the conventions of lyric poetry as well as Ṣūfī psychology, a man remains merely a man.

But the act of reclothing transformed more than just the surface of the narrative. It marked the advent of the narrative into an entirely new realm of existence—from the oral to the written. A narrative deemed inelegant, and therefore unworthy of the kind of sustained, formal attention required by writing, could be redeemed by the transforming touch of Persian, for this was the language of the literate as well as the literarily sensitive—of men like Arzū and Mukhlis, the leading intellects of late Mughal Delhi.

Just two years after Mukhwīṣ tailored the Persian robes for the Hindi beloved his fellow-townsman Nāṣir ‘Ali ‘Andalīb embarked on a project in which once again the move from Hindi to Persian coincided with the move from the oral to the written. ‘Andalīb was a Naqshbandī Šūfī in the lineage of Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindī. His crowning literary achievement was the Nālā-ye ‘Andalīb, Nightingale’s Lament, a rambling mystical tale recounting the vagaries of a love affair between the nightingale as the paradigmatic lover, and the rose as its beloved. Even more than as the father of The Lament ‘Andalīb is known as the father of Mīr Dard—remembered, along with Saudā and Mīr, as the one of the greatest eighteenth-century Urdu poets. In 1741 ‘Andalīb lost his spiritual guide Muḥammad Zubair. On the day of Muḥammad Zubair’s death ‘Andalīb had planned to “express a number of subtleties of the religious law (shari‘ah), like the rituals of pilgrimage, to which not everybody’s understanding can enter.”31 This learned discourse, however, was not to happen, for even as ‘Andalīb prepared for it he was deflected from its narration by the news of Muḥammad Zubair’s death. Too distressed to proceed with technicalities of canon law on pilgrimage rituals he began, instead, to tell a cycle of romantic tales to such friends and disciples who came to pay him visits of condolence. The stories were told in Hindi, and the fact of their narration in Hindi was noted and pointed out: “He told this

story in the Hindi language during three nights to them (i.e. the friends and disciples), and thanks to the divine influence all those who listened to it were deeply impressed and started crying and weeping."32 Since the narration had proved so effective in moving the disciples to ecstasy it was decided to capture it on paper, and in this act of transcription the young Mir Dard served as his father’s secretary:

And the happy and fortunate Khvājah Mir, who is my middle son—and verily, about him the saying, ‘The best things are those in the middle’ came true—took paper and pen into his right hand and sat besides me and wrote down letter by letter.33

In fact, Dard did somewhat more than just capture the narration ‘letter by letter’. In its immense sweep Dard’s version was an elaboration which in its Dickensian proportions of nine-hundered pages daunts most readers. But it was, significantly, an elaboration in Persian. Even as the fluidity of an oral narration congealed on the page, it changed from Hindi to Persian.

II.5 Sharaf al-Din Maneri: Hindi as Spontaneity

What profile may we begin to assemble from these fragments? That for Dard and ‘Andalib, as also for Mukhlis and his circle, Hindi was associated with the informality of the spoken word whose conscious formalization through writing demanded Persian? That in the hierarchic literary

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32 Ibid., 44.

33 Ibid., 44.
imagination of both the Mughal literati and Sufi communities Hindi was primarily equated with inelegant and rough speech? Or may we also conclude that Hindi sprang to the lips of a Mughal elite like ‘Andalib at moments of great stress, so that it was further valorized as a language of spontaneous emotion? As such Hindi would seem to be the voice of that first surge of emotion needing subsequent attenuation and modulation—reflective undertakings demanding the use of Persian. In the imagination of an elite adib or Sufi Hindi may not have been the preferred bearer of polished written reflections. But we would err in simply stopping there, for the matter was not so simple as to allow us to place Hindi in an unambiguously negative position. The comments of both Mukhlis and ‘Andalib suggest that even in the imagination of such elite Persianized members of Mughal society Hindi evoked emotional resonances which Persian did not, and perhaps could not evoke. To penetrate this landscape of emotional resonances of which we catch glimpses from stray comments is the challenge facing cultural historians.

But the way into this landscape does not lie through strictly divergent paths; the landscape is far too complex to allow us to build any easy dichotomies. We cannot, in other words, rest content with positing a clear correspondence between Persian and written literature on the one hand, and Hindi and oral literataure on the other. Whatever the literary attitudes of late Mughal authors like Mukhlis, Dard or ‘Andalib, Hindi did overcome the hesitance of the literate Persianate community to emerge onto the page in written form. And it did so a full two centuries before its ‘proponents’ like Arzu and Mukhlis appeared on the scene; nor can one trace the beginnings of
written Hindi compositions by Persianate authors to the self-consciously eclectic political climate of Akbar's court where nobles like 'Abd al-Raḥīm Ḵ̣hān-i Ḵ̣hānān patronized Persian as well as Hindi poets, and reluctant courtiers like Badāyūnī were commanded by the emperor to prepare Persian translations of Sanskrit epics.

Already as early as 1504, when there was not even a whiff of the Mughals in the North Indian air, Muslim poets like Qutban were composing elaborate compositions like Mrigavati in Hindi. Thereafter, one witnesses a great efflorescence of Hindi romances such as Jāyasī's Padmāvat and Manjhan's Madhumālatī, both written in the fourth decade of the sixteenth century when the Mughal hold on India was so tenuous that the Mughal emperor Humayun was temporarily exiled in Safavid Iran. Thus, a quest for the resonance of Hindi in its community of Persianate readers leads us to a time before the Mughals, preparing us for the possibility that in actively reading, copying, translating and transcreating Hindi narratives like Padmāvat Mughal authors like Rāzī and Muḥkliṣ were the inheritors, rather than coiners, of a literary taste that occasionally valued Hindi as a language of written, rather than exclusively oral, literature. In other words, we ought to entertain the possibility of significant continuities in the literary tastes of pre-Mughal and Mughal Persianate elites, rather than assuming that the Mughal advent in North India represents an abrupt turn marking the rise of Hindi literature by Persianate authors.

A search for Hindi in its pre-Mughal Persianate communities reveals one unmistakable pattern: whether it appears casually and occasionally, as in
the Khuldabad texts discussed by Ernst, or more 'formally' in texts like Padmāvat, Hindi was frequently used by Śūfis, only very occasionally by court poets like Amīr Khusro34, and almost never by historians or canon lawyers who composed their works in Persian and Arabic respectively. Thus, in looking to the Śūfis for the early uses of Urdu or Hindi ‘Abd al-Ḥaq and Ernst are quite logically examining the ground they know to be the most likely to reveal clues. We too might begin with the pre-Mughal Śūfis to uncover those literary attitudes which helped Hindi overcome the ambivalence of Persianate authors and on occasion become the preferred language of literary expression, whether oral or written.

Here is a comment on Hindi by the fourteenth-century Bihari Śūfi Saint Sharāf al-Dīn Manerī (d. 1381). Once while attending the noonday prayers Manerī heard verses sung first in Persian and then in Hindi. After the singing was over the Saint was deeply moved and said:

Hindavi compositions are very forthright and frank in expression. In purely Persian verses, there is a judicious blend of allusions and what can fittingly be expressed, whereas Hindavi employs very very frank expressions. There is no limit to what it explicitly reveals. It is very disturbing, it is extremely

34 Amīr Khusro is traditionally and conventionally credited with a large Hindi corpus; however, Mohammad Wahid Mirzā is of the opinion that he may actually have composed far less in Hindi than he is traditionally accredited with because most Hindi verses attributed to him are so suspiciously like the modern Khari boli that one begins to wonder whether they are not recent interpolations to his corpus. See "Khusro's Hindi Poetry," in The Life and Works of Amīr Khusro (Lahore: Panjab University Press, 1962), 227-232. See also Khusro's preface to Ghurrat al-kamal as quoted in Mohammad Wahid Mirzā, 139-161.
difficult for young men to bear such things, they are moved immediately.\textsuperscript{35}

For Māneṛi Hindi's lack of literary artifice and verbal subtlety was a positive quality, for it seems that in Hindi Māneṛi felt the loosening of the strict rules of circumlocution and oblique references demanded by formal discourse in high Persian. It was this casting aside of conventions that enabled Hindi to 'explicitly reveal' things without any limit. And the effects of such revelations, Māneṛi tells us, was felt most sharply by young men, the most boisterous age-group in any human population. Again, as with 'Andalīb and Mukhlīs we see that for Māneṛi Hindi was the voice of spontaneous emotion. Implicit in all of these accounts is an opposition of raw emotion to deliberation and knowledge. It is worth remembering that upon being moved by his master's death 'Andalīb switches from a discussion of legalities to love tales, and the switch in subject matter simultaneously demands the move into Hindi. But the act of writing steers the narrative back to Persian. Thus, it is precisely because Hindi is not fettered by the elaborate conventions of the people of taste (ahl-i ūāq) that it can speak to Māneṛi, and move him. We are aware, then, of two rather different definitions of taste (ūāq), one espoused by such literati as Umrāo Jān or Ānand Rām, the other by a Ṣūfī Shaikh.

II.6 Taqī al-Dīn Rabbānī: Hindi Defended

Another reaction to Hindi by a Ṣūfī is mentioned by the historian Badāyūnī in his chronicle Muntakhab al-Tavārikh, written at the court of Akbar in late 16th-century. Badāyūnī relates an occasion when the learned scholars (afāzal) of Delhi censured a certain Shaikh Taqī al-Dīn Rabbānī for reading Hindi verses from the pulpit. As it happens, Taqī al-Dīn was reciting verses from Candāyana, the earliest of the Premākhyānas written in the late-fourteenth century by Maulānā Dāūd. The scholars bluntly inquired about Taqī al-Dīn’s point in selecting a Hindi maṣnāvī. In his defence Taqī al-Dīn answered:

The whole of this poem contains divine truths (ḥaqāiq) and its mystical meanings are the direct experience of the divine, (ẓauq) [he uses the same word as Umrāo and Ānand Rām]. The poem is in agreement with those people who have a capacity for ecstasy, and also with those who are blessed with longing and a propensity for love (ahl-i shauq o ‘ishq). It is also in agreement with Quranic commentary, and with some verses from the Quran. Even now when Indian singers publicly recite it they captivate all hearts.\(^\text{36}\)

In this passage Taqī al-Dīn sketches a series of oppositions which transform his apology into an oblique critique of the scholars who questioned him censoriously for his use of Hindi. He argues his defence in a language borrowed liberally from Ṣūfī technical terminology, and in order to grasp its subtleties we need to dwell on the peculiar meaning of his words within a

specifically Şūfi context. He begins by claiming that the entire poem contains divine truths (haqāiq), and that the spiritual import of the poem (ma'ñî) is the very direct experience of God (ţauq). In Mukhliş' account we have already encountered the term ţauq in its conventional meaning as 'literary taste'. In Şūfi discourse, however, it acquires a very specific meaning as "the direct quality of mystical experience" or "a direct tasting of the divine substance." It is in this specifically Şūfi sense that the Shaikh was using the term in his defence against the learned scholars of the city.

Taqi al-Din proceeds to say that the poem is in agreement with those people who have the capacity for ecstacy (vajd). Again, vajd is a technical Sufi term meaning that particular type of ecstacy which may overtake one upon hearing religious music performed in ritualized musical gatherings called Sam'—familiar to us in their contemporary form as qawvālī. Vajd, is often exhibited through such physical states as losing consciousness, or swaying to the rhythm of the music being performed. In some Sufi circles the capacity for vajd was recognized as proof of spiritual refinement; in fact, the Chishti Sufis of South Asia claimed sam' and the ecstacy (vajd) inspired by it as the very cornerstones of their identity.

The 'ulamā, or religious lawyers, however, took a consistently different position throughout Islamic history. They found the emphatic physical responses inspired by vajd to be inappropriate in the expression of religious sentiments, and prescribed, instead, a restrained approach based on reason and deliberation (‘ilm). There persisted, therefore, a tension between the religious scholars (‘ulamā) and many Şūfis who were not only open to the
effects of \textit{vajd}, but sought them out. The tension may be said to center around an \textit{‘ilm}-based and a \textit{vajd}-based approach to religious experience. Shaikh ‘Ali Hujviri, the great 10th-century religious scholar from Lahore sketches the polarity of \textit{‘ilm} and \textit{vajd} when he says: “It behooves the seeker in all circumstances to be a follower of reason (\textit{‘ilm}) and of the religious law (\textit{shari‘ah}), for when he is overcome by \textit{vajd} he is deprived of all discrimination.”

Hujviri’s opposition of \textit{‘ilm} and \textit{vajd} is subsumed within a larger binary opposition—between \textit{shari‘ah}, or Islamic religious law, and \textit{haqiqat}, or the inner essence. \textit{Shari‘ah} is the legalistic, external face of the Quranic revelation, while \textit{haqiqat} is its esoteric substance. The image conventionally offered by Sufis for illustrating this contrast is that of the hard outer shell of a nut, and its soft pith within. That Taqi al-Din is also evoking such a binary opposition becomes clear when we see that immediately after talking of the propensity of the poem to induce ecstasy, he takes pains to point out that the poem is also in agreement with Quranic passages. By thus juxtaposing ecstasy (\textit{vajd}), and rational knowledge (\textit{‘ilm}) Taqi al-Din simultaneously evokes the distinction between \textit{shari‘ah} and \textit{haqiqat}.

From his repeated emphasis on technical terms like \textit{vajd} we can infer that Taqi al-Din was steeped in Sufi learning and may even have belonged to an order like the Chishtis, who had adopted the performance of religious music at a Saint’s tomb as the distinguishing feature of their order. Through his favorable emphasis on \textit{vajd} and \textit{haqiqat} Taqi al-Din obliquely suggests that those religious scholars who raised an objection to the use of a Hindi
poem (and who are the proponents of *shari‘ah*) lack the capacity of being moved by love, the very substance and point of the poem. According to Taqī al-Dīn’s argument they are not the ‘people of love and longing’ (*ahl-i shauq-o ‘ishq*), for if they were they would have been sensitive to the essential import of the poem, and would not have fussed about such superficial matters as the language in which it is composed. Taqī al-Dīn’s apology, then, is simultaneously a critique of the limitations of orthodox religious lawyers (*‘ulamā*) and of *‘ilm*, the specific modality of knowledge in which they specialize. This point, of course, would be clearer, and certainly more elegantly expressed, to a Persian speaker who would immediately grasp that both *‘ilm* and *‘ulamā* are derived from the same Arabic verbal root, *‘LM*, meaning ‘to know rationally’.

II.7 Tārīḵ-i Jāyas: Hindi and Ḥaqīqat

We can now begin to place Hindi in its conceptual niche in Mughal culture. The identity of Hindi was defined by both meanings of *żauq*. On the one hand we have the conventional definition of *żauq* as refined literary taste acquired by formal schooling. This *żauq* was expressed through restrained elegance—such as that of Umrāo in her later life as a reclusive-poet, or of the orthodox scholars and religious lawyers in the time of Taqī al-Dīn. Both the urban intellectual (*adīb*), and the religious scholar (*‘ulamā*) were occupational types whom we can isolate as predictable exemplars of this *żauq*. 
On the other hand, however, we have the specifically Şūfi definition of żauq as epiphanic and ecstatic knowledge, dependent on one’s capacity to love fully and to be moved—but emphatically not dependent on the acquisition of factual knowledge, or rational analysis. This żauq commonly manifested itself in outbursts of ecstasy such as that aroused by Sam’ concerts. I suggest that while deemed inadequate in the expression of the former żauq, Hindi in the Mughal imagination was deemed entirely suitable for the expression of żauq in its peculiarly Şūfi meaning as the epiphanic experience of the divine.

But the picture is yet sketchy. Let us see if other Şūfi authors also placed Hindi in a similar conceptual niche within the hierarchy of desired knowledges and emotions. I now present an alleged use of Hindi by Muḥammad Jāyasī in what is probably his only pre-modern biography. In the late-eighteenth century a certain ‘Abdul Qādir, a resident of the town of Jāyas, and a Şūfi belonging to the same lineage of Chishtis as Muḥammad Jāyasī wrote a history of the town, calling it Tārikh-i Jāyas, or simply History of Jāyas.\(^{37}\) In the history ‘Abdul Qādir emphasized the Chishti Şūfis as the spiritual focus of the town, and traced their lineage to the fourteenth-century Saint, Sayyad Ashraf Jahāngīr Simnānī. As his descendants the Jāyas-Chishis called themselves the ‘Ashrafi family’ (khāndān-i Ashrafiyah). As a member of this spiritual-family and a chronicler ‘Abdul Qādir has several ideological

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\(^{37}\) The text exists only as an unpublished and unedited manuscript. ‘Abdul Qādir Jāyasī, Tārikh-i Jāyas (Lucknow: Nadavat al-‘Ulamā, unnumbered manuscript).
concerns which provide the frame of logic within which we must locate the specific incidents 'Abdul Qādir relates.

One of 'Abdul Qādir's concerns as a historian was to prove the essential soundness of a prediction made by a founding member of the Ashrafi family who once predicted that the subsequent Sūfis in the lineage will be 'given to madness'. The word used by this Sūfi for 'a mad-man' was 'majzūb'—derived from the Arabic verbal root JZB, meaning 'to be absorbed in.' In Sūfi technical terminology a majzūb was a person so absorbed in God as to be heedless of the implications of his image in the public eye. Thus, externally āzib and vajd often led Sūfis to exhibit the same unconstrained and flamboyant behavior which earned them the censure of the religious lawyers ('ulama). Majzūbs, however, were expected and respected members of Sūfi communities, for āzib was widely regarded as the special mark of the spiritual maturity of a Sūfi.

It is spiritually within the lineage of Ashrafi Sūfis, and conceptually within the logic of āzib as a desired moral quality, that 'Abdul Qādir places Muḥammad Jāyasī. What is lacking in 'Abdul Qādir's account is an estimation of Jāyasī as a poet. If 'Abdul Qādir dwells on Muhammad Jāyasi's personality it is only because incidents in Jayasi's life can be adduced as 'proofs' of the spiritual excellence of the Ashrafi family. The text is, in our terms, a hagiography, and not a social or literary history. Nonetheless, we can

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38 The prediction was made by one of the descendants of Jahāngīr Simnānī at the time of the settlement of the town of Jāyas, and its first 'proof' was Muhammad Jāyasī's direct master, Mubārak Bodle, who was given to smoking opium, and was, therefore, constantly in a state of intoxication. 'Abdul Qādir Jāyasī, Tārikh, t. 9.
glean a wealth of social details from it. We learn from ‘Abdul Qādir’s account that Jāyasī was patronized by the Hindu Rājā of the nearby town of Amethī, was born into the landed aristocracy of Jāyas with the title of Malik, which carried with it the charge of 2,000 cavalrymen, but that due to his reclusive nature he had retired on his estate to farm.

The bulk of ‘Abdul Qādir’s hagiography concentrates on Jāyasī’s relation to his immediate spiritual master, Mubārak Bodle. The linguistic choices made by ‘Abdul Qādir in reporting the conversations between the two corroborate Eaton’s observations about the uses of Hindi and Persian. We find, for example, that ‘Abdul Qādir has Jāyasī speak Persian whenever he speaks in prose, but on the two occasions when the disciple is moved to break out in verse, it is in Hindi.

Let us examine one instance of the use of Hindi by Muḥammad Jāyasī and how its fits within the emerging picture of Hindi as the language of epiphany (zaqq), and also within ‘Abdul Qādir’s hagiographic agenda of jāzb—absorption in God—as the defining quality of the Ashrafi Ṣūfis. One biographical vignette which concludes very pointedly with Jāyasī’s use of Hindi verse begins with Jāyasī approaching Bodle to seek a cure for a paralysis that left one half of his body insensate. Bodle prescribes a penance which requires Jāyasī to never eat alone but always to share his food with a guest (mehmān). Once, while Jāyasī is meditating in the forest he is approached by a girl who offers him rice pudding. This, however, presents a dilemma, for there is no one to share the food and the woman is unwilling to breach the rules of commensality and eat with a man for fear of evincing
excessive informality. She agrees, however, to go find a man to share the pudding with Jáyasí. The only man available, however, was a laborer (mazdūr) cutting fuel-wood. And as chance would have it, this man also happens to be a leper, dripping with blood and pus. Naturally, the laborer is reluctant to share Jáyasí’s food—not only is he nervous about his lower social status, but he also fears polluting Jáyasí’s food with his blood. Jáyasí, however, forces him to sit down and start eating, and not merely in his company, but from the very same plate, since ‘such is the order of my pīr’. As the blood and pus from the open sores mixes with the food Jáyasí is disgusted to his very soul (nafs-i Malik Šāhab ikrāh namūd) and is about to vomit. However, he manfully (mardānah) remembers his master’s prescriptions, overcomes his disgusted spirit, and "closed the eyes which only percieve external reality" (casm-i zāhir-bīn band namūdah). And then, with one good swallow he downs his own morsel. The second he does so the leper vanishes in a flash, and there stands in his place the Prophet Muḥammad. And here ‘Abdul Qādir says:

As soon as that food went down his gullet, his inner eyes (casm-i bātinī) opened. And now when he opened his external eyes the form of the labourer disappeared. The ocean of esoteric knowledge (daryā-ye bātinī) welled up in Jáyasí’s breast and its waves roared. Due to the excess of wonderment and the intensity of love (fart-i ta‘shshuq), as well as the proximity of divine presence, the doors of gnosis (ma’rifah) opened, and all signs of the inner essence (ḥaqīqat) manifested themselves. At this point this Hindi couplet, which is in sortḥā meter, sprang (bar-āmad) to his lips: būndī samandar samān, yeh acaraj kāse kahūn? Jo herā so harān, Muḥammad āpahūn āpahiū āp men: The drop’s the same as the ocean. To whom shall I tell this perfect
wonder? For he who sees this is bound to lose: Muḥammad's in one's self by himself.\textsuperscript{39}

It is a deliciously ambiguous couplet (\textit{dohā}), and one impossible to translate well because of the many puns embedded in it. Jāyasī plays on the two meanings of the pronoun 'āp', which primarily means 'you', but may also mean 'oneself'. Thus, the blurring of the distinction between self and other is emphasized by the ambiguity in the use of 'āp.' Of course, the ambiguity is rendered more delicious by the fact that Jāyasī's own first name was Muḥammad. Thus, Jāyasī's point about the essential unity of self and other finds an immediate verbal echo in the two Muḥammad-s—one the Prophet, the other the poet. Similarly, much can also be made of the verb 'hārnā, 'to lose'. Is Jāyasī merely referring to the fact that he who tries to see this paradoxical identity of man and Muhammad with the physical eyes is bound to be thwarted—and thus lost? or is he hinting, instead, that if one sees the blurring of the identities of drop and ocean, self and other, then one loses oneself in the process?

It is, of course, precisely such ambiguities which make Jāyasī's verse worth reading; but they need not detain us in our pursuit of the question of the use and valorization of Hindi in Persian prose. To answer the question of the logic of Hindi use we should begin by noting that before presenting Jāyasī's miraculous vision of the leper as Muḥammad, 'Abdul Qādir pointedly draws the reader's attention to the fact that Jāyasī was using a

\textsuperscript{39}'Abdul Qādir Jāyasī, \textit{Tārikh}, ff. 19-20.
Hindi couplet. By pointedly calling attention to the fact of a Hindi expression 'Abdul Qādir places Hindi emphatically within the orbit of a series of technical Šūfi concepts he subsequently mentions: we see, for example that he places Hindi in close proximity to haqīqat (esoteric knowledge), thereby immediately evoking its structural opposite sharī‘ah (religious law).

More significantly for the emerging picture of Hindi, 'Abdul Qādir places Hindi in congruity with ma‘rifah, (gnosis). Ma‘rifah is one of the several Perso-Arabic words for 'knowledge' carrying a specifically Šūfi coloring as esoteric knowledge. As such it defines a different conceptual field than 'ilm, or factual, formal, analytic knowledge. Here in Abdul Qādir's narrative we see one clear instance of how Hindi was linked with a perception of reality not discursive or analytic, but synthetic and sudden. Indeed, it is significant that Jáyasī sees the leper's identity with both Muhammad and himself at the precise moment when his physical eyes are closed. This is necessarily so, for in the logic of 'Abdul Qādir's hagiographic imagination this paradox is invisible to physical eyes, just as in Sufi thought this experience is inaccessible to 'ilm, and is best approached through 'the doors of ma‘rifah' (abvāb-i ma‘rifah).

In Tārīkh-i Jáyas Hindi marks an epiphanic rupture in the fabric of the otherwise Persian prose. As such Hindi is a marker of status within the hierarchy of values promoted by Šūfīs in their self-definition as specialists in ma‘rifah, haqīqat and jażb, rather than as the keepers of 'ilm,--the special domain of the 'ulamā. In contradistinction to Eaton's view of Hindi as inadequate for the expression of true Šūfi ideas, we see Šūfīs repeatedly
choosing Hindi over Persian specifically because they perceived it as lacking in artifice, formality, finesse, and formal systematic schooling, all of which were the markers of such marginally desirable qualities as rational knowledge (‘ilm), or literary taste (žauq).

Mughal Šūfis, then, used Hindi verse but not to communicate to the commoners. They did so in order to make a clear statement of their identity as distinct from that of both religious lawyers and literary scholars—their two most frequent rivals in elite Mughal society. As such their Hindi comments are directed at each other, and at other members of the elite society.

The point about the different identities of Sufis, religious lawyers and literary scholars, however, should be made gingerly, and with full recognition of the fluidity of social identities. One needs, simultaneously, to recognize that most prominent Mughal Šūfis were also highly trained in the tradition of religious law, though they frequently tried not to serve in bureaucratic positions requiring its enforcement. In other words, many Šūfis were religious lawyers by training, but not by profession. It also needs to be recognized that much of the courtly poetry written by the urban literati like Ānand Rām or Umrāo Jān is unimaginable without the firm conceptual foundation of Šūfī technical terms, and narrative scenarios; similarly Šūfī hagiographic discourse looses much of its piquancy and punch if deprived of the tradition of Persian poetry, for poetry was used by all educated members of Mughal society to assert and clinch rhetorical points, as indeed it still is in the North Indian Urdu culture. In other words, the imaginative worlds of Šūfis, ‘ulamā and literary scholars touched and overlapped significantly. But I
would say that they were not identical, and that the gradations between them were asserted pointedly through the use of different languages.

There is also the danger that in equating Hindi and Hindi poetic expressions with the qualities of rusticity and spontaneity one will convey the romantic connotations which both these words have for English speakers. It is true that 'Abdul Qādir has Jāyasī speaking in Hindi when Jāyasī is emotionally moved, but this spontaneity is a far cry from that of the English romantic poet throwing off the shackles of a moribund classical tradition and expressing his individuality. The spontaneity with which Jāyasī speaks was in the Šūfi conception the result of a special vision honed by adherence to a rigorous system of religious discipline and apprenticeship to a Shaikh. Thus, it was not merely an innate spontaneity, but one which had to be developed through hard self-discipline.

While remaining cautious of the possibility of such oversimplifications I would say that in Šūfi writings there is an implicit consensus that while 'ilm and žauq (as literary taste) are the necessary attributes of an educated person, they are not enough by themselves in helping one lead a completely meaningful life. And this perception occasionally paves the way for the use of Hindi, not as an instrument of conversion, nor yet as a concession to the simple sensibilities of rural folk, but as an effective vehicle for the expression of such emotional states and modalities of knowledge as can better be captured by it. The articulation of these emotional states, experiences and modes of knowledge served, in turn, to express social gradations within Mughal society--gradations between the different professional,
psychological, and educational goals of Şūfīs, religious scholars and literary scholars.
CHAPTER THREE

HINDI AS THE LANGUAGE OF CONVERSION

III. 1 Muḥammad Afzal’s Biḳat Kahānī

In Umrāo Jān’s career first as a courtesan, and then a poet-recluse we catch glimmers of an attitude about the issue of literary language and its varying uses by women and men. In her gradual moral ‘edification’ through exposure to Persian classics, and in her enthusiastic acceptance by the male poets, we glimpse an equation of Persian with the domains of rational knowledge, moral discernment as well as literary finesse; and in Umrāo’s impassioned denial of the use of feminine verb forms characteristic of rekhtī speech we sense yet another facet of this literary attitude--its unfavourable stance on poetic expression in an explicitly feminine voice. By distancing herself from her femininity, and proving this distance through a display of Persianness (fārsīyāt), Umrāo claimed for herself an exalted place in the estimation of the male literati of Lucknow. Had she acquiesced to Īkān Sahib’s request for rekhtī she would most likely have been branded a mere entertainer, for expression in an explicitly feminine persona conveyed to her male audience frivolity and levity. Whereas an established male poet might
deliberately use frivolous language in order to prove his virtuosic mastery of
*rekhtī* speech, a female poet could scarcely afford to espouse such language
lest she be dismissed as a mere woman—compelled by her gender to the
expression of the lighter sentiments.

And yet, as we are about to see, throughout the Mughal period
Umrao’s male predecessors defied this literary censure by writing often in the
voice of a woman. And when the Persianized Mughal poets did so they
simultaneously shed their *fārsīyat* by slipping into a language shot through
with Sanskrit-derived words—a speech which today we call ‘Hindi’. It is this
frequent coincidence of Hindi with an explicitly feminine persona in Mughal
poetry that presents the central problem I explore in this chapter. As I explore
the seemingly anomalous use of both Hindi and the feminine ‘I’ by
Persianized Mughal poets let us retain as its backdrop the issue of conversion
to Islam through the use of a demotic vernacular—for it is this question which
enables us to talk of the politics as well aesthetics of the Mughal response to an
Indian environment.

Sometime in the first two decades of the seventeenth-century a
provincial Mughal poet by the name of Muhammad Afzal wrote a long lyric
poem in rhyming couplets, and called it *Bikat Kahanī, The Terrible Tale*.1
Afzal’s poem belongs to a well-known genre of pre-modern North Indian

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1For critical editions see: *Afzal kā Bārahmāsā ma’ Sharh*, ed. Akhlaq Ḥusain Arif
(Lucknow: Nizāmī Press, 1989); *Bikat Kahanī*, ed. Nūr al-Ḥasan Hashmi and Masud Ḥusain
Khān (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy, 1979). All references are to Nūr al-Ḥasan
Hashmi’s edition.
poetry called the Bārahmāsā, or the 'Twelve-month Cycle'. The Bārahmāsā presents the sentiment of a lover's separation from the beloved, and in this general sense is not very different from the Persian lyric, the ghazal. The unique texture of the Bārahmāsā derives, however, from two peculiarities. The suffering lover of the Bārahmāsā, called the nāyikā, is unambiguously a woman grieving for an unmistakably male lover—sometimes even her husband. In her laments the nāyikā typically addresses her female companions, and sometimes even older female relatives.

By contrast the Persian and Urdu ghazal are at pains to leave the gender of both the lover and the beloved unspecified. Furthermore, the world of the ghazal is quite admantly non-domestic: mothers, sisters and women friends don’t intrude upon the lamenting lover. Secondly, the Bārahmāsā unfolds the sentiments of the female lover against the detailed background of changing seasons; thus, the changes in the natural world—such as turning leaves, or the migrations of birds—evoke different memories and sorrows in the lover. The Bārahmāsā has a sorrow for every season. That the emotions are governed by the changing seasons is stressed by the very structure of the Bārahmāsā which, divided into twelve sections, corresponds neatly to the twelve months of the Indian calendar. The Persian ghazal also made use of the seasons as a backdrop for the lover’s sentiment, but usually only the spring and autumn.

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\(^2\) On the the generic tradition of the Bārahmāsā see Charlotte Vaudeville Bārahmāsā in Indian Literatures: Songs of the Twelve Months in Indo-Aryan Literatures (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986)
A further difference between the ghazal and the Bārahmāsā is that the rhythm of the Bārahmāsā is modulated specifically to the Indian landscape, with much being made of the monsoons—the traditional season when martial or mercantile Indians wound up the season to return home after a year of either raiding or trading as heavy rains made most roads impassable. The Bārahmāsā derives its greatest pathos from the wayward man who defies this normal rhythm of the Indian year and stays away even during the rains. It is not accidental that in Bikat Kahānī Afzal introduces us to the lover’s sorrows during the month of sāvan (July), when the monsoon is at its height, and thus the laments of the lonely nāyikā presumably at their shrillest.

In all of this Afzal conforms to the conventions of the genre of Bārahmāsā. Where he differs quite markedly is in his use of language, for Bikat Kahānī is not just in a dialect of Hindi. Instead, Afzal’s language ranges from pure Persian—such as when he quotes verses picked from the corpus of the Persian poet Jāmī—, to dialects of western-Hindi with a predominance of tadbhava words derived from Sanskrit. This range is already unusual for its

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3 For example: biyā, ai 'ishq-i pur afsūn o nairang/ keh bāshad kār-i to gah sulh, gah jang: Come, Love, you who're full of deceptions/For at times you grant peace, but then again just strife. Couplets 46-50 in Hāshmi’s edition present a fragment of an entire ghazal by Jāmī that Afzal inserts in his poem and labels clearly as being from the Persian poet.

4 A tadbhava (literally, ‘born from it’) is a Sanskrit-, rather than Arabic or Persian-derived, word which in the course of its historical existence has gone through sound changes in consonance with the modern Indian language in which it is used. Thus, ‘bikat’ is a tadbhava word, being derived from the Sanskrit ‘vikata,’ ‘immense’ or ‘terrible.’ By analogy Latinate words in English might be called tadbhava, and Italian may be said to bear a strongly tadbhava relationship to Latin. Since there is no technical English term describing this process in South Asia (Latinate immediately takes us to the specific terrain of Europe and Latin), I will henceforth treat this as an English noun and also use the verb ‘tadbhavization’ to refer to the process by which a particular register of speech or writing is ‘infused’ with Sanskrit-derived vocabulary. Its opposite in the case of North Indian literary texts would be ‘Persianization’ or ‘Arabization’, and, more recently, ‘Anglicization.’ For the cultural
two linguistic extremities, but it is the middle range of Afżal's language that is the most surprising for here one sees the most agile turns of phrase. Take, for example, a sentence where the grieving nāyikā taunts those 'warriors' who have never known the pain of separation:

\[
bavāi ki nahin jis shakhš ko pīr \\
ce dānad dard-e digar rā, are bīr\]

He who's never known the pangs of madness
What does that warrior know of other pains?

The English translation inevitably levels the macaronic texture of the couplet which alternates between such Hindi words as 'pīr' ('pain', derived from the Sanskrit 'pīdā'), and 'bīr' ('warrior', derived from the Sanskrit 'vīra'). But in contrast to these tadbhava words what is one to make of the phrase 'ce dāndad dard-i digar rā', "What does he know of other pains"? The fragment is surprising, and not just in its use of Persian nouns, but even Persian verbs and case markers? It is above all through these that Afżal creates a linguistic texture so markedly different from that of the early Urdu of poets like Saudā, who certainly use a highly Persianized vocabulary of nouns and adjectives, but never Persian verbs or case markers.

The use of Persian verbs and verse fragments is all the more unusual when juxtaposed against certain special forms of address which Afżal

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historian and literary critic the issue, then, is the aesthetic, emotional and social consequences of tadbhavization of a work which could otherwise have been expressed in another register, such as for example, the Persian or Arabic.

\(^5\) Afżal, Bikaṣ Kahānī, couplet 10.
borrows the stock vocabulary of a special female speech which Hindi-speaking men never use except to mimic women. Afzal's nāyikā, for example, frequently prefaces her laments with the vocative 'rī', used exclusively by women when addressing other women of roughly the same age and status. Thus, for example, the nāyikā says:

*Khirad gum kardah, majnūn ho rahi rī*

Losing my wits [pure Persian], I became a second Majnūn[in Hindi].

This already stark contrast between Persian and the special domain of Hindi feminine speech is further complicated by the variations in the kinds of Hindi Afzal chooses. His is not a uniform dialect of Hindi, but rather alternates between Braj and Kharī bolī (two dialects of Western Hindi from the region around Delhi), with occasional words taken from the dialect of Southern Hindi. Afzal seems interested in using the widest possible range of language, not in order to create a middle range of language using some elements of both. He aims, instead, to juxtapose the different languages in discrete bits—much like the tesserae of a mosaic which retain their separate outlines and identities despite their placement within a larger tableau.

If Afzal's macaronic verse were the only example of its kind we might note it for its peculiarity and move on. However, far from being the only one of its kind *Bikaṭ Kahānī* is part of a corpus of Perso-Hindi macaronic verse—a

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corpus which is mostly unpublished and seldom discussed, for neither Hindi
nor Persian scholars from South Asia claim it as the property of 'their' literary
canons, while Iranian or Western scholars of Persian generally consider it
outside the pale of 'proper' Persian. Thus it is that the curlews which cried
'through throats where many rivers meet' are today heard by no one at all.
This is what I mean by a disabling assumption of monolingualism in the
study of South Asian literature.

Whether or not we feel comfortable in acknowledging their presence,
but perhaps more pertinently whether or not we are up to the linguistic
challenge posed by such texts, Perso-Hindi macaronic texts abound. And we
do not have to look far, for in the textual tradition of Padmāvat itself we
witness a confluence of Hindi and Persian. Soon after being composed in
Hindi by Jāyasī, the tale of Padmāvat was retold by 'Aqīl Қhān Rāzī, the
governor of the city of Delhi and the deputy of Emperor Aurangzeb in the
last years of his rule over the Mughal Empire⁷. In his abridged version of the
Padmāvat Rāzī inserts couplets from such famous Hindi poets as Sūrdās
within the otherwise Persian body of his verse. Again, as with Afzal, Rāzī
also seeks to juxtapose discrete bits of Hindi and Persian, rather than to blend
their grammars and vocabularies to create a middle range like Urdu.

⁷ Rāzī's retelling was called Shama' o Parvānah (The Flame and the Moth) and exists
only in unpublished manuscript versions; see 'Aqīl Қhān Rāzī, Shama' o Parvānah, Ethé Ms.
=1634, London, British Library
Now that we have noted the peculiarities of Mughal macaronic verse, the question remains why elite, Mughal authors should choose to write in Hindi when they clearly lived in a courtly sub-culture which valued Persian as the language of refined discourse, especially for the expression of lyric poetry.

Eaton’s and ʿAbdul Ḥaq’s explanations offer us no signposts in our search, for they specifically address the motivations of missionary Ṣūfīs in writing Hindi; and *Bikat Kahānī* is emphatically not a Ṣūfī text. The Urdu critic Hāfiz Maḥmūd Sherānī suggests a possible approach.8 By placing *Bikat Kahānī* within a discussion of the development of Urdu in Punjab Sherānī locates its macaronic quality within a teleology of Urdu. Placed in a venerable genealogy consisting of the Hindavi writings of Amīr ʿAlī and Sharāf al-Dīn Manerī Afzal becomes a humble contributor to the long process of linguistic brewing which finally culminates in the ‘real’ Urdu of Saudā, Mīr and, of course, Ghālib. As such *Bikat Kahānī* marks a way-stop on the long march of the North Indian vernacular towards the telos of the fully mature idiom of Delhi in mid-eighteenth century. The process of brewing by which Urdu allegedly formed itself is sketched by Sherānī through analogy with code-switching in modern North Indian--and especially Punjabi--speech where, says Sherānī: “a speaker may begin with the intention of uttering a sentence in Urdu, stuffs an English snippet in the middle, only to end with a

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Punjabi verb. Such a point is reached without any special effort or artifice. (yeh sūrat baţhair kisi khāš koshish yā tasannu‘ ke paidā ho gayī hai)⁹. But in Sherānī’s estimation the peculiar macaronism of Bikaṭ Kahānī is no asset; and so, he continues, “In this poem Persian phrases and compounds have been crammed in at all odd points in such a way that the modern taste cannot find them acceptable.” Of course, since in Sherānī’s view this is incipient Urdu such ungainliness is to be expected—especially when it comes from Punjab.

For Sherānī the Hindi-Persian macaronism of Bikaṭ Kahānī bears the same taint of grossness as did the mixed Latin-Italian verse for Italian humanists who first coined the term ‘maccheronica’ to name a kind of burlesque pioneered in the late fifteenth-century. Here is Teofilo Folegno, a Paduan humanist, and perhaps the most famous Italian macaronic poet, defining his practice in the treatise he wrote in 1517:

This poetic art is called ‘macaronic’ from macarones, which are a certain dough made up of flour, cheese and butter—thick, coarse and rustic. Thus, macaronic poems must have nothing but fat, coarseness and gross words in them.¹⁰

For the refined Latinate tastes of Folegno macaronic speech was just as low in the hierarchy of possible speeches as macaroni still is in our own

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⁹ Sherānī, p. 100.

culinary hierarchy of Italian pastas. And yet, gross as it was—or rather, precisely *because* it was deemed gross—this mixture of Italian and Latin was judged the more effective in making jabs. Sharper barbs could be fashioned of it than of the smooth Latin.

And it is here that we must begin with *Bikat Kahānī*—by asking what could better be expressed in a mixture of Hindi and Persian that could not as effectively be said in pure Persian—the expected choice of language for a literatus like Afżal.

But it is also here that we have to admit to a blindness, for we cannot sit in the presence of a seventeenth-century reader of *Bikat Kahānī* to see whether a smile played upon his face as he heard the *nāyikā* grieve in both Hindi and Persian. Impossible to be certain, but it does seem to me that unlike the burlesque of Folegno, Afżal’s intent was not to make the grieving *nāyikā* the butt of satire or parody. The primary mood in *Bikat Kahānī* is the pathos of separation, or *viraha*. The reader is not asked to laugh at the *nāyikā* but, rather, to cry with her.\(^1\)

I will explore the issue of the particular kind of pathos enhanced by Hindi, but first I voice a disagreement with Sherānī by pointing out that *Bikat*

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\(^1\)It is tantalizing to speculate on why linguistic hybridity in Indo-Persian literature should not be used for purposes of parody as it repeatedly was by the Italian humanists. On this see the brief remarks of Sheldon Pollock who argues that in European literary cultures linguistic diversity often bore the taint of corruption and fall from an original ideal state of linguistic homogeneity: “multilinguality is tainted with the guilt of diversity: Babel marks an original sin, and European cultural politics in early modernity can arguably be interpreted, at the level of language, as a project of reduction and hence purification.” in “India in the Vernacular Millenium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000-1500,” *Daedalus* (Summer, 1998), p. 62.
Kahānī is not casual or spoken speech. It is, instead, a highly self-conscious literary undertaking. Its alternation of Hindi and Persian is, I would argue, a matter of far greater deliberation and aesthetic choice than the interlinguistic slippages in modern or pre-modern street-speech. Its macaronism is precisely a result of artifice, and mannerism (tasannuf'). Its heteroglot nature didn't just come about, but was deliberately, even painstakingly, constructed. If one is attentive to the literariness of Bikat Kahānī then one must ask how its macaronic texture resulted from aesthetic choices made by a competent and sensitive author trying to enhance the pathos of separation by the use of Hindi.

Before attempting an answer to this question let us begin by recognizing that whatever Afzal's motivations in alternating between Persian and varieties of Hindi, the result was a text of such complexity that it could only be enjoyed by a highly-educated polyglot, well-versed in both Hindi and Persian. The enjoyment of such linguistic and literary complexity presupposes a degree of education and cosmopolitan experience not available to rural masses. Their liberal use of Hindi notwithstanding Bikat Kahānī and Rāzī's Padmāvat are both texts written for the highly educated Persianized elite of Muḥgal India--whether they were Hindu or Muslim. In other words, we have to imagine an author like Afzal or Rāzī inspired by something other than the virtuous ideal of communicating to the masses by writing in their vernacular. We have to posit an ideal reader who was familiar with Persian and several dialects of Hindi, and furthermore, was well-enough read in both literary traditions to appreciate the departures from the generic conventions
of both the Bārahmāsā and the  ghazal--departures which make Bikat Kahānī a memorable text. Such a reader would not have acquired Hindi or Persian merely to cope with the demands of living in a multi-lingual society, but would have been interested in mining this dual heritage to extend the expressive reach of both languages.

One expressive world which opens more fully to Afzal through his use of Hindi is, I would argue, the world of feminine\(^{12}\) and familial emotions. Both Hindi and Persian possessed an elaborate vocabulary for the expression of a lover's grief at separation from the beloved; but in writing Bikat Kahānī Afzal was tackling a genre which probed specifically feminine emotions, and which heightened the pathos of separation by positioning the confined woman gazing out at the expanse of changing nature--an expanse denied her but containing her lost, or worst yet, deceitful lover. The Bārahmāsā derived its emotional punch from the unequal status, positioning and movement of the wayward man and the sedentary woman.

The strongest voice in the tradition of Persian poetry was that of the  ghazal--and this was an emphatically ungendered voice. The strict avoidance of gender specificity in the Persian  ghazal was achieved all the more naturally for, unlike Hindi or Urdu, Persian lacks gendered verbs, nouns or adjectives. Of course, it is perfectly possible for the Persian narrator to assume a female persona by describing unambiguously feminine scenarios, or parts of the

\(^{12}\) Feminine experiences and emotions as construed by a Mughal, and not a contemporary, audience. Thus, I do not want to suggest the existence of a stable set of emotions and experiences which are the essential and exclusive domain of women in all historical circumstances, but rather to sketch that range of sentiments which Mughal society deemed the natural domain of women.
female anatomy—but such directness was deemed crass by the society which produced the ghazal. It was not possible, however, to stress the gender of the speaker through the structure of Persian grammar itself. By using Hindi, and especially that subset of Hindi which is used only by women, Afzal grounds Bīkaṭ Kahanī specifically and unambiguously within a feminine setting. Now the laments echo unmistakably in the privacy of the women’s quarters where the only immediate hearers are other women addressed by the nāyikā in the intimate, feminine vocative "ṛī". We the readers—and especially the men—are eavesdroppers. Even for contemporary readers like myself this aesthetic of eavesdropping constitutes one of the central delights of reading a Bārahmāsā. Imagine, then, how much more intense the delight of eavesdropping for a male Mughal reader living in a society far more radically segregated by gender than ours. This is the physical world of the Bārahmāsā without inhabiting which we cannot inhabit the emotions of the grieving nāyikā.

III. 2 Burhānuddīn Rāz-i Ilahi: Hindi and Feminine Shame

Afzal’s use of Hindi as a feminizing agent is also consistent with other Mughal texts in which an elite, Persian-knowing author speaks in Hindi when assuming a specifically feminine persona, or when reporting a woman’s speech. For instance, in ʾAqīl Ḵān Rāzī’s translation of Padmāvat Hindi appears most frequently when the speaker is Princess Padmāvatī. I will explore Rāzī’s poem in greater detail in chapter five, but for now let us see
which literary paradigms Rāzī used in forging a coincidence of Hindi with feminine speech, for this opens a window, not only on the gendered use of Hindi, but also on the process by which it was accommodated within Islamic and Persianate frames. In identifying possible literary paradigms available to Rāzī one need not look very far afield, for the Şūfi circle within which Rāzī was initiated was led by the celebrated Shattārī Saint Burḥānuddīn Rāz-i Ilāhī, the author of a macaronic poem in which Hindi was used to voice feminine scenarios and sentiments, and Persian in commenting on them.

'Aqil Khān Rāzī was a prominent bureaucrat entrusted with the management of various aspects of The Red-Fort during Aurangzeb's long reign. He was also a patron and benefactor of Persian-writing poets like Bedil. But it was neither in his capacity as a bureaucrat nor as an urban literatus that Rāzī composed most of his works. The bulk of Rāzī's poetry was composed in his capacity as the disciple (murīd) of Burḥānuddīn Rāz-i Ilāhī, who maintained his dargāh in the important provincial town of Burḥānpur.

The crucial significance of this pir-murīd relationship to Rāzī's literary persona is evident in the pen-name 'Rāzī', which was derived from Burḥānuddīn's title, 'Rāz-i Ilāhī,' meaning 'the divine Secret.' As the adjectival form of 'rāz' (secret), 'rāzī' means 'belonging to rāz.' Therefore, by

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13 For a more detailed sketch of Rāzī's life and personality see chapter five which is mostly devoted to him.

14 For a history of Burḥānpur see Maulavi Khafī al-Rahmān Burhanpuri, Tārīkh-i Burhanpur (Delhi: Matbāh-ye Mujtābāī, 1899) On Burḥānuddīn Rāz-i Ilāhī see pp. 140-42.
choosing this pen-name (*takhallus*) Rāzī was simultaneously announcing to the world his dependence upon the saint. The pen-name did more, however, than just trace a spiritual genealogy; it also functioned aesthetically in the poet's verse. For example, when Rāzī ended one of his *ghazals* with a couplet containing a neat juxtaposition of the names 'Rāzī' and 'Burhān', he expressed the hierarchical relation between himself and his spiritual guide:

*Rāzī -ye sar gashtah rá, 'ishq cūn shud rahnumā rāft o bah dast-i niyāz dāman-i Burhān girift*

When love led the way of Rāzī, who'd lost his wits
He rushed, and with needy hands, grasped Burhān's skirt\(^\text{15}\)

In locating the possible paradigms Rāzī may have used in threading Hindi into the body of his Persian translation we would do well to probe the creative personality of Burhānuddīn, for his works provide the most immediate intellectual and spiritual context for Rāzī's thought. They also provide us with a glimpse into a very different use of Hindi than Afzal's *Bārahmāsā*, for Burhānuddīn's work is emphatically Šūfi in its orientation, and thus a good location to observe how Hindi was accommodated within a specifically Islamic--as opposed to a generally Islamicate or Persianate--environment.

\(^{15}\)Rāzī's *Divān*, like the rest of his poetry, has never been published and exists only in manuscript form; for a selection of his *ghazals* from which this couplet is taken see Waris Kirmani, ed. *Dreams Forgotten: An Anthology of Indo-Persian Poetry*. 'Aligarh: Academic Publishers, 1986. p. 296.
Although Burhānuddīn Rāz-i Ilāhī was trained in Islamic theology--and thus presumably knew Arabic well--the bulk of his writings was in Persian. One of these, Sharḥ-i Aṣmā-ye Ḥasanā (Explanation of the Beautiful Names) was a commentary on the ninety-nine names of Allāh. It no longer survives, and neither does another commentary on the rudiments of Muslim belief in God, Amintu Billaḥ. What does exist, however, is a long narrative poem in Hindi called, quite simply, Pem Kahānī, The Love Story.\textsuperscript{16} It is this poem, along with its Persian prose commentary, that claims our attention as we explore the uses of Hindi in its Persianate environment.

Like the Bāraḥmāsā, Pem Kahānī also begins with a lament and an invitation to a female friend (sakhī) to listen to a tale of tragic love:

\textit{Pem kahānī kahat hūn suno sakhi tum āe
Piyū ko dhūdhan hūn gayī, āyī āp ganvāe.}\textsuperscript{17}

I’m telling the tale of love, come listen to me, O Sakhī
I’d gone in search of my love, and ended by losing myself.

By addressing a sakhi, or female friend, the speaker in the poem identifies not just the addressee’s gender but also her own, for a sakhi is not just a female friend, but specifically a woman’s female friend. Men, in other words, do not speak of sakhis, even when referring to their female acquaintances or lovers. The very use of the word ‘sakhi’ is limited by gender.


\textsuperscript{17} Burhānuddin, Pem Kahānī, edited by Rāshid, couplet 1, p. 310.
The tale which is then told by the unnamed speaker (we may call her a nāyikā) to her sakhī is of a quest for a male lover, who is variously called ‘piyu’, beloved, or ‘mohan,’ ‘charmer.’ But the invitation to hear the tale comes with a warning, for its hearer, we learn, may lose everything in the act of hearing:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pem kahānī bis bharī, mat suniyo koi āe} \\
\text{bāton bāton bis carhe dekhat hain ghar jāe} \\
\text{Pem kahānī jo sune, tan, man dīhan de vār...}^{18}
\end{align*}
\]

Love’s tale is full of poison, let no one come to hear
The poison works in a flash, too late, you’ll see, to run home
Your mind, your wealth, your body—all lost, if you hear this tale...

But, of course, the narrative does unfold; and as it does we encounter the nāyikā in repose—safely asleep at home, her legs stretched out on the bed—until her prince-charming (mohan) comes knocking on the door. Succumbing to his charms she sallies forth; and as she steps out into the city-streets she finds herself pressed in an alley too narrow to hold both her and her beloved. Thus it dawns on the nāyikā that it is she herself who is the greatest impediment to her quest—she has to leave behind not only her body, but also her mind and self:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pem gali ati sānkarī, piyu bin kachu na samāe} \\
\text{tan man chod jo ā sake, to hi āyā jāe}^{19}
\end{align*}
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Love’s alley’s far too narrow, nothing but the beloved fits
Only he enters—who leaves his mind and body behind

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\(^{19}\) Burhānuddin, *Pem Kahārī*, edited by Farid, couplet 12, p. 10.
Burhanuddin moves quite conventionally within the framework of Classical Hindi (Braj) lyric poetry where the nayika in her special role as an abhisiarika (she who goes out) emerges from the house to keep her tryst with her male lover. The strikingly beautiful iconography of the abhisiarika nayika, preserved in countless Rajput miniatures, shows her braving the night in a hurried flight through darkness, tripping over snakes and accosted, sometimes, by ghouls. Burhanuddin’s nayika is certainly an abhisiarika, but she is more than just this; for when he has the nayika refer to her lover as ‘mohan’ (charmer), Burhanuddin complicates her identity by introducing an ambiguity. The ambiguity rests on the unmistakably Vaishnava echoes of the name ‘mohan’—an epithet of Krishna in his role as the seducer of young women. Is this, then, a ‘mohan’ in the general sense that any beloved might be said to be a charmer, or is he, instead, Krishna himself? For if the lover is Mohan as Krsna, then our nayika is not just any love-lorn woman, but Radha.

Occasionally the ambiguity seems settled in favor of Radha, such as when the nayika speaks of the impossibility of moving through the city carrying a heavy pot of milk as her Mohan harasses her by pulling her arms. At such turns in the narrative her foray into the world outside is an enactment of an old trope: the young milk-maids of Braj being accosted by Krsna who flirts shamelessly with them and robs them of the milk they are carrying to the market. But whether she is just an abhisiarika nayika, or more specifically Radha, one thing is certain—the speaker and her interlocutor are
both women speaking in the peculiar idiom of Hindi which women use exclusively with each other. *Pem Kahānī*, Like Afzal's *Bārahmāsā*, is also emphatically a narration *by* a woman and--within the world created by the poem--*for* a woman.

The femininity of the speaker is crucial to the emotional impact and relevance of the quest that forms the narrative backbone of *Pem Kahānī*. The quest is relevant because much more than love depends on it. Above all, it is a dangerous quest, for in launching it the nāyikā abandons her home, thereby wagering her honor and modesty as she wanders into the public space of the city. In telling her sakhī of the nature of her venture the nāyikā mentions several losses. We have already seen that as she emerges into the alley she becomes aware of the necessity of losing her mind and body, for they are too gross to fit in the space.

The other loss on which she dwells at great length, however, is the loss to her modesty and honour, both summed up by the Sanskrit-derived word 'lāj'. And it is when she talks of 'lāj' that we see how inextricably tied up with her femininity is the emotive thrust of the poem, for within the conventions of Hindi it is only a woman who can have 'lāj'. A man, by contrast may lose his 'izzat' (social reputation), but he does not possess 'lāj'--understood primarily as social reputation based on domestic rootedness and rectitude. It is thus that wandering about the city aimlessly brings shame and

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20 For example, when she finds her eyes wandering uncontrollably in search for mohan she says: *sudh-budh tan-man so gayī, aur nain so gayī lāj; my mind’s lost all thought, and my eyes have lost all lāj*. Burhānuddin, *Pem Kahānī*, edited by Faādī, couplet 17, p. 11. See also couplet 21 in Faādī's edition.
censure to the nāyikā. It is the suggestion of a possible danger to her body, but a certain danger to her reputation, that whets our appetites as we read of the nāyikā’s movements in the narrow alleys of love.

It was precisely this gendered quality and its emotive texture that was flattened when Burḥānuddīn attempted his Persian prose commentary on the Hindi verses of Pem Kahānī. Burḥānuddīn begins by giving a short literal meaning of the Hindi poem in Persian by using the phrase “āshiq gūyad,’ ‘the lover says.’ In Persian usage, of course, the Arabic noun ‘āshiq’ is ungendered; but like any educated Persian speaker Burḥānuddīn and his circle of Sūfis knew Arabic well enough to know that in Arabic the noun carries a male gender. Thus, to any educated user of Persian the word ‘āshiq’ has a masculine feel, even though in Persian this masculinity could not be grammatically brought out by the use of gendered verbs or pronouns. But Burḥānuddīn did have the alternative of referring to the nāyikā with the feminine form “āshiqā,” thereby preserving her feminine identity. He did not do so for the conventions of Persian did not permit the use of this awkward and little-used noun. Had he used it would have sounded a discordant note. The only choice Burḥānuddīn had was to talk of an “āshiq’, and its effect, of course, was to reverse the nāyikā’s gender. In the Persian commentary she necessarily becomes a ‘he’.

Let us see what happens to the nāyikā’s gender in Urdu where it is grammatically possible to speak unambiguously both of a woman and as a woman. When Muḥammad Rashid, the editor of Pem Kahānī, translates into
Urdu Burhānuddīn’s Persian commentary on the very first line of the poem, he says:

Ma’nī-ye-ẓāhir yeh hain keh maïn ‘ishq kī kahānī kahtā hūn, doston āo aur suno, maïn dost kī justī keh liye gayā thā, khud ko bhī gum kar āyā. [emphases mine]²¹

The external meaning is this that: I am telling the tale of love; O friends, come and listen. I had gone in search of the friend, and ended up losing myself.

In Urdu the nāyikā is transformed even more unequivocally into a male through the use of masculine verbs—such as āyā, or gayā—agreeing with the masculine noun ‘āšīq.’ The expectations of Urdu literary speech proved simply too strong for Rashid to overcome—especially since in writing of lyric poetry he was thinking within the strict parameters of the possibilities offered by the discourse of the ghazal.

Given the ungendered quality of Persian grammar as well as the convention of avoiding gender specificity in lyric discourse it would have been difficult for Burhānuddīn to negotiate in Persian the emotions which make Pem Kahānī work as a poem. Had he lived a century later it would have been difficult for him to write it in Urdu as well. To speak in Urdu was to speak either as a man or a woman; but to write in it, and especially to write of love, was to aim at the greatest possible degree of obliqueness by using only the male forms of address. To do otherwise was, and still is, considered to be crass. To speak forthrightly in Urdu of a ‘ma’shūqā’ (female beloved) is

to imply something unseemly about her character, such as, for example, that she is a prostitute. Thus, specificity of gender—especially the feminine gender—in the expression of a subject as intimate as sex or love is deemed gross in Urdu culture. Similarly, in Mughal India—the precursor of the Urdu culture—specific references to the feminine gender were also considered crass in lyric poetry.

By comparison, to speak in Hindi was likewise to speak as either a man or a woman. But to write in Hindi freed one to speak both of a woman and as a woman without violating the demands of polite discourse or literary finesse. This was not just a matter of grammatical possibilities but, rather, of what was conventionally permissible in a specific literary genre given a collective sensibility that prized delicate circumlocution as a measure of both literary and moral refinement.

The conventions of Hindi lyric poetry certainly made it possible to make the most of feminine scenarios and the cluster of emotions and values evoked by them; but the writer also ran a risk, for these lyric conventions were so redolent of narrative scenarios from Kṛṣṇa’s mythology that one’s nāyakas and nāyikās often took on the hues of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. Even if this didn’t inevitably happen as a result of writing in Hindi the perceptive author often wanted to create such fusions of identity, since to exploit the potentialities of Hindi lyric discourse to the fullest was to invoke the two paradigmatic lovers who were, ultimately, the referents of all nāyakas and nāyikās.
We see Burhānuddīn doing precisely this, and as a result his nāyikā takes on a depth of identity she may not otherwise have had. But this fusion of identities also presented a problem, for unlike Afzal, Burhānuddīn was a prominent Shaikh in the Shattārī Sūfī community, and thus a conspicuous member of a specifically Islamic--and not merely an Islamicate--sub-culture. As a poet he could, of course, savor Hindi and the resulting Indic texture of Pem Kahānī. He could also count on a sophisticated audience of Sūfī or courtly readers to do the same. But in his capacity as a leader of an important Sūfī order he was expected to do more. He was expected, first, to bring his expression into a more explicit congruity with Islam; but more specifically, he was expected to forge a link between his own teaching and the historical transmission of learning which formed the Sūfī tradition; it was this sequence of transmission which formed his spiritual genealogy, and so the basis of his claim to spiritual authority. It was to effect such a congruity with both scriptural Islam and the historic sequence of Sūfī learning that Burhānuddīn wrote his Persian prose commentary on Pem Kahānī.

I present a lengthy translation of Burhānuddīn's commentary on the very first line of Pem Kahānī for two reasons. First, it is only by entering Burhānuddīn’s thought in all its density that one may develop a feel and appreciation for his creativity, and second, because to engage his argument in its specificity is the best way to enter the logic by which Hindi was accommodated within the framework of both Islam and a Persianate aesthetic. Furthermore, the patterns of commenting and literary accommodation which we discern in Burhānuddīn’s prose will later furnish
us with a point of departure in discussing Rāzī’s work as a subtle negotiation between an Indic and a Persianate texture.

After explaining the literal (zāhirī) meaning of the opening couplet where the nāyikā invites the sakhī to listen, Burhānuddīn begins his discourse on the inner (bāṭinī) meaning of the couplet:

When an innately fortunate person is held captive by this pain (of love) then losing all self-control on the path of desire and wearying of both his own self and of others that person spontaneously ends up saying:

"dast az ṭalab na dāram tā kār-i man bar-āyad
yā tan rasad bah jānān, yā jān zi tan bar-āyad"

"I’ll never be done with seeking, until I’m finally done
Either my body attains the beloved, or the soul attains to
death."

Such a person wanders from door to door in search of his beloved and finally, greatly irritated, he says:

"Ṣālhā dar ṭalab-i rūye nekū dar ba daram
rūyī banumā o khulāsam kun az in dar ba darī"

"Year after year in search of the fair face, I’m door to door
Show the face and end for me this constant door-to-
dooring."

And then he seeks to banish this pain from anyone he happens to run into. Bayazid Bistami, the King of the Gnostics, was also in this precise state in the very beginning (stages of his search). Once he asked an Arabian where he might find the cure for his pain. The Arabian answered "The very avenue from which this pain has reached you will also provide the cure. In other words, this pain had its origins in your inner self (dar bāṭin), thus for its cure also you must turn inwards-- "We are closer to Him than the jugular vein."

Your desired one (matlub) is not far from you. All the ancients are agreed on this point, that soaring to the heavens, or sifting the earth will not reveal his whereabouts;
instead, he who is wise (‘ārif) seeks him within his own being (vujūd), and it is there that he finds him: “he who knows himself knows his Lord.” My counsel ends here but if your heart is illumined by the light of Islam (nūr al-islām) then it should be entirely clear that the desired one is present in your being. Why search elsewhere:

Yār-i mā bah māst, kai az mā judāst
māṯ-yē mā pardah-dār-i yār-i māst

Our friend’s with us, when’s he otherwise?
Our usness holds the veil in between

Hazrat Bahauddin Naqshband, may peace be upon him, says “Those who belong to God (ahl-i allah) see everything they see within themselves. They do not recognize anyone besides themselves.” He adds, “Why don’t you taste your own substance? (follows a ḥadīth). A certain elder (buzurg) hinted thus:

Cashm-i dil cūn bāz shud, mašūq rā dar khvīsh did
ʿain daryā gasht cūn bedār shud cashm-i ḥabāb

When heart’s eye opened it saw the beloved within itself
When the source flowed forth in stream, the bubble opened its eye.

And this stage, within the technical vocabulary of the Ṣūfis is called Fanā fi-allah, or dying in Allah.22

This, as I read it, is an extremely ambitious commentary, for it tries to effect three accommodations: to bring the Hindi tone and Indic texture of Pem Kāhānī into a more explicit relationship with the Quran, with Ṣūfī history, and with a Persianate aesthetic. The first thing which strikes the reader, and perhaps especially the modern reader, is that when Burhānuddin speaks in his own words he speaks rather predictably. It is only when he

quotes others that the commentary can be felt to attain an eloquence. We can draw one of two possible conclusions from this: either that Burhānuddīn was not a very competent author, or that he was primarily interested in building up a dense network of supporting quotations held together by his prose, so that his own words functioned as the mortar holding together the nuggets of poetic and Quranic quotations. For Burhānuddīn this network consisted of three types of allusions: Persian couplets by famous poets like Ḥāfīz and ‘Irāqī, anecdotes of famous Sūfis like Bahā‘uddīn Naqshband, and, lastly, verse fragments from the Quran.

These allusions make both aesthetic and ‘scriptural’ appeals to the perceptive reader, but they all have one thing in common: they broaden the allusive field of the Hindi poem to all of Islamdom by inserting the poem within a network of intertextual allusions drawn from two classical Islamic languages: Persian and Arabic. Burhānuddīn begins this process by appealing first to his readers’ aesthetic sensibility when he prefaces his discussion of the lover by quoting the opening couplet (matla’) of a ghazal by Ḥāfīz in which the celebrated poet talks of the persistence of seeking and desiring unto death. As the most frequently quoted and highly respected poet in the tradition of Persian classical poetry Ḥāfīz’s presence serves to ‘establish’ the academic and aesthetic credentials of the rest of Burhānuddīn’s discourse.

The aesthetic appeal to the Persian-knowing reader is then consistently maintained by Burhānuddīn—for the rest of the commentary is, in a sense, simply an excuse for stringing together couplets dealing with the paradox of losing oneself through searching. And so the reader is led through
a number of couplets by unnamed poets until the very last couplet evokes the arresting image of a bubble opening its eye and seeing, but simultaneously disappearing. It is at this point, when the commentary achieves its greatest aesthetic attenuation, that Burḥānuddīn jumps to his point: the nāyikā’s dangerous quest and subsequent self-loosing are nothing but illustrations of the technical Sūfī concept of fanā fi allāh, the snuffing out of the bubble of individual consciousness.

But the commentary demands more than an aesthetic response; it appeals also to the reader’s sense of history by quoting such early Sūfis as Bāyzid Bistāmī, as well as such recent ones as Bahāʿuddīn Naqshbandī, the founder of the Naqshbandī order of Sūfis who arrived in India in late sixteenth-century, and within a few decades already counted among their leaders such influential figures as Ahmad Sarhindī. Finally, the third type of intertext is the ‘most frankly’ Islamic, being drawn from the Quran itself—such as when Burḥānuddīn talks of the beloved being closer to us than the jugular vein itself. Perhaps the most striking allusion to the Quran is when later in the commentary Burḥānuddīn homologizes Mohan to Joseph, and the nāyikā to the woman from the city of ‘Ad, who was infatuated with Joseph’s beauty. Krshṇa stands prefigured, then, in the figure of Joseph.

In writing Pem Kāhānī Burḥānuddīn uses Hindi for the literary expression of the extreme sentiment of viraha, and then ‘academicizes’ it by commenting on it in analytic Persian prose. The strategy for commenting includes locating the sentiment and its supporting narrative scenarios and characters within a tradition of not only Persian poetry, but also that of
Quranic quotations. Thus, the original Indic idiom is not only Persianized, it is also Islamicized by being contained within an intertextual network of Quranic quotations. In such a work the Indic, Persianate and Islamic textures are simultaneously present.

We may never know the exact chronology of the conception of *Pem Kahānī*; it may well be that Burhānuddīn initially conceived the Hindi verses and then elaborated on them in Persian and Arabic prose, or it may be that he originally intended the Hindi to stand within the commentatorial framework of Persian prose. But if we define the text as it exists in its manuscript form—and thus as it would have been encountered by its readers—then it is less useful to think of it in terms of an Indic core which is later given a Persianate tone and Islamic texture. The processes of Indicization, Persianization and Islamicization are not easily mapped on a time-line, for the macaronic nature of the manuscript effects a constant oscillation between the Persianate, Indic and Islamic textures.

In this polyphony of textures the Indic corresponds neatly to the initial expression of a sentiment in a woman's voice. This expression is poetic rather than prosaic; and it is in Hindi. But, significantly, Hindi is not made to bear the burden of analysis. It is not used for reflection on itself, nor on the sentiments it so effectively evokes. It is, we may say, mutely eloquent. The function of Arabic is even more limited. Its presence is mostly iconic—a fragment here or there, displayed for its prestige value as the language of Quranic revelation. In this ecology of languages it is Persian which occupies the broadest niche and enjoys the most diversified uses. It is the language of
analytic prose, used for reflecting on both the Indic sentiment and Arabic fragments. It may, thus, be said to be the bearer of ‘ilm, or analytic knowledge. But that is far from being its only function, for as the many Persian couplets testify, it is also the effective bearer of an aesthetic appeal to the reader. It exists in both verse and prose. It is both cerebral and heartfelt. It speaks the loudest—but in a voice which drowns out the words of the woman. And thus it is inadequate to the expression of a poem grounded in a woman’s predicament.

III. 3 Muḥammad Rafi‘ Saudā: Hindi and Feminine Grief

The convention of using Hindi for women’s speech was not peculiar to the Persian-writing Muḥgal literati, but continued into the eighteenth-century, by when the same literati were writing increasingly in a heavily Persianized Urdu.²³ A simultaneous consideration of Hindi in relation to a newly emerging Urdu of course invites the charge that in its new juxtaposition with Urdu, Hindi must necessarily have been valorized differently than in the previous century when Persian was the only expected choice for literary expression by the Muḥgal elite; to continue the biological metaphor, a changed habitat creates a different ecology. A honing of our understanding of the changing flavor of Hindi certainly demands reflection on how Hindi acquired a different set of cultural resonances as a result of the

²³ For a history of the naming of this new vernacular see Shamṣ al-Raḥmān Fārūqī, Annual of Urdu Studies (vol. 13, 1998), pp. 10-11.
rise of Urdu in eighteenth-century Mughal India; however, to the extent that Urdu and Persian continued to be written by the very same authors a consideration of Urdu verse illumines yet another aspect of the ecology of Hindi in its Persianate environment.

The work of Muhammad Rafi` Saudā²⁴ (1713-80) is a good place to begin examining the continuing use of Hindi as a feminizing agent in its Persianate environment, for not only does Saudā stand at the very cusp of the era when the Mughal elite began using Urdu for literary purposes, but the linguistic range of Saudā’s verse is somewhat greater than that of later Urdu poets like Ghalib who confined themselves almost exclusively to a Perso-Arabic lexicon. Saudā, by contrast, wrote not only in the idiom that we have come to know as ‘standard’ Urdu, but occasionally also ranged into pure Persian as well as into the range of Sanskrit-derived vocabulary which today we call Hindi. Saudā’s work, therefore, is an ideal place to begin asking questions about the ecology of languages in the elite literary culture of Mughal India.

Saudā was a prolific writer. His kulliyāt (collected works) consists of two massive volumes arranged according to the various genres expected of an Urdu poet. One encounters, first, his biting satires (hijīv) on which, above all, Saudā based his reputation; then follow the Urdu ghazals, the mašnavīs (narrative lyric poems), and marṣiyahs, elegies in honour of the martyrs of the

battle of Karbalā. Saudā’s Persian ghazals constitute the smallest section, and finally bring the kulliyāt to its close. The basic stock of Saudā’s lexicon is not radically different from that of classical Urdu poetry in its degree of Persianization; however, in all of these genres (except the Persian poems) one notices a greater flexibility of linguistic range than in the work of especially nineteenth-century Urdu poets like Ghālib or Zauq. And this flexibility becomes especially apparent in Saudā’s maršiyahs, where he ranges frequently into a Sanskrit-derived vocabulary of tadbhava words not as frequently encountered in his ghazal or satires. Some tadbhava words (like ‘sis’ and ‘ran’ ‘head’ and ‘battle’) come to form the stock of conventionally-used words in the evolving idiom of Urdu maršiyahs, and the reader comes to expect them in the writing of not only Saudā, but even later maršiyah writers like Mir Anis and Dabir. But occasionally Saudā composes maršiyahs in a register which even for his corpus of maršiyahs is unusual in its density of tadbhava words; and in these maršiyahs it is not just the vocabulary, but also the grammar, which is remarkable in its proximity to the grammar of regional Hindi dialects like Braj, Deccani, and, in one instance, even Panjabi.²⁵

Saudā’s maršiyahs provoke two questions about the aesthetic and emotional resonance of Hindi in its Persianate environment. First, why is it especially in the genre of the Urdu maršiyah that we see the greatest

departures from a Persianized vocabulary, and second, why, within this field of relatively un-Persianized vocabulary, do certain marṣiyahs stand out even more in their use of tadbhava words?

One such marṣiyah containing a combination of regional Hindi grammar with Sanskrit-derived words presents the laments of the women survivors of the house of Ḥusain. The speakers in the elegy are: Fāṭimah, the mother of Ḥusain; Zainab, his sister; and Sakina, his young daughter. As they are all led in chains through the burning desert to the Caliph’s palace in Damascus, we encounter Fāṭimah, grieving her dead son:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Kāse kahiye bāt kaun man sun ke būjhe} \\
\text{rovat hū dīn rāt Ḥusainā ran mē jūjhe} \\
\text{nainana barasat nirakhata, umagata hai chhātī} \\
\text{pyāse māre hāe nābī ke aise nātī} \\
\text{gerū se kapḍe range, mukh par male bhabhūt} \\
\text{pūcche bibī fātimā “kit gaiyo mero pūt”?}^{26}
\end{align*}
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Whom shall I tell, who will understand?
Weeping I spend my days and nights--my Husaina dead in battle
Eyes rain as I gaze, and my chest heaves
How they slayed with thirst the grandson of the prophet
Dyeing her clothes with saffron, rubbing her face with ashes
Sobbing, says Bibi Fāṭimah “Where’s my son gone?”

We may well shy away from the politically thorny issue of labeling Fāṭimā’s speech. Indeed, our choices are many, and bewildering: is it, for example, ‘Urdu’ or ‘proto-Urdu’, ‘Hindi’ or ‘Hindavi’? Or is it, instead, the classical literary dialect of ‘Braj’? The debate about the precise nomenclature and classification of Hindi-versus-Urdu has long exercised us, and it is, in my

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opinion, both arid and pointless, since answers to it are largely dependent on
one's ambitions in forging either long or short genealogies for contemporary
speech. As such it reveals far more about the politics of contemporary South
Asian language communities than about Mughal social realities or esthetic
values. In fact, I would claim that the tussle over whether a literary text is in
Hindi or Urdu is largely a distraction which detains us from the more
pertinent issue of discussing the aesthetics and politics of the literary text in
question, whatever its linguistic classification. In this case I simply follow
Saudā's lead, for he himself felt the need to name the particular register of
speech when he labeled the maršiyā clearly as being "dar zabān-i purabi
āmez"—"mixed with the eastern dialect."

Whatever the linguistic label we choose to give Fāṭimah's lament it
abounds in Sanskrit-derived words like 'pūt', 'nain' and 'mukh', which are
anomalous within the larger context of Saudā's poetry, for this poetry
remains within a more strictly Persian register. Both the narrator's speech and
that of the women in this elegy lacks the Perso-Arabic vocabulary which
Saudā uses extensively in his ghazals as well as other maršiyahs. Furthermore,
in his use of forms like 'gaiyo' and 'kit' (instead of gayā and
kahā) Fāṭimā departs entirely from the standard Urdu-Khari bolī grammar
normally used by Saudā as well as most non-Deccani Urdu poets. The tone
of Fāṭimah's speech is certainly less polished because of her avoidance of

27 Deccani Urdu ghazal poets like Quli Qutb Shāh are known for their liberal use of
tadbhava words as well as the feminine voice; this, however, is a tradition that dies out in the
Deccan by the early eighteenth century; and it is a tradition that does not significantly
influence either the North Indian Rekhta-Urdu poetic tradition or the history of its criticism.
Persian and her use of a regional Hindi dialect; but it is partly as a result of this that it is laced with an informal, familial affection—a tone established immediately in the opening line by Fāṭimah’s transformation of ‘Ḥusain’ into ‘Ḥusainā’ through the addition of the diminutive suffix ‘ā’. Fāṭimā thus claims the prerogative of a mother to address as a little child the son who was in fact in his fifties when he lay headless and parched in the sands of Karbalā.

The loss which Saudā explores here is specifically a domestic and familial loss. It is, in other words, a loss unimaginable in the topography of the ghazal which, though also a poetry of loss, does not accommodate sorrow within the confines of the home. Widowhood and sonlessness are modalities of grief which appear risible, if not monstrous, when grafted onto the body of a ghazal. The grieving lover of the ghazal inhabits a far bleaker space. And he inhabits a more public space. The ghazal plays itself out in a series of conventionalized topographies: the kūcā (alley), the bāzār, the caman (garden), the dasht (wilderness), and the bazm (soiree). Typically the lover in the ghazal may hang about the beloved’s alley in hopes of catching a glimpse of him/her; he may try to intercept the beloved in the garden where the flowers remind him of the beloved’s face and the cypress of his graceful stature; he may finally glimpse the beloved in the soiree, only to be snubbed or pointedly ignored; disappointed in love, and oblivious to his appearance, he may appear in the most public of all places, the bazar, where there is no dearth of advisers to counsel him at droning length, and where he may also be upbraided by the Shaikh for his shameless behaviour; exhausted, the lover may finally retreat to the wilderness which forms the antithesis to the city, the
site of his public humiliation and private pain. But note that except for the soiree every one of these scenarios defines an open, publicly accessible space; and even the soiree, though held indoors, is only a marginally domestic space, being limited to the most public part of an elite house, the living room. The *ghazal* maintains a scrupulous distance from the home and locates its sorrows in non-domestic spaces.\(^{28}\) And along with domestic spaces the *ghazal* avoids familial relations. As I stressed earlier, mothers, sisters or fathers do not intrude upon the lover’s sorrows, either to comfort or chide; nor do they comment upon the beloved’s wilful cruelty. In the emotional logic of the *ghazal* the home and the family are not only a distraction, they are a dissonance.

The *maršiyah*, by contrast, is nothing if not a poem of domestic sorrows and concrete blood relations. Not only is its location domestic, but it is, furthermore, a specific domestic scene—the family of Imām Ḥusain. And since the *maršiyah* locates itself unequivocally in the family it also locates itself in the specifics of gender—women form fully half the cast of characters in the *maršiyah*. The laments of the male characters in a *maršiyah* often come from the battlefield; but the women grieve from the seclusion of the tents pitched outside the battlefield of Karbalā. And the occasions on which we hear the women lament include such intensely domestic—and thus all the more macabre—occasions as the ‘wedding’ of Qāsim, held on the eve of the

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\(^{28}\) Even when the home appears in the *ghazal* it is significant as a ‘negative space,’ that is, for its inaccessibility for the lover. For example, in Ghālib’s famous she’r: *main vahan pahuncha to un ki galiyon kā kya javab. yad thin jītī duānēn sarf-i darban ho gayin*. Though at last I reached his [beloved’s] home what could I say to his stream of abuses? Every prayer I knew I’d used up to slip past the door-keeper.
final battle—an occasion for which the groom's body arrives riding on a bier. An exception to these 'indoor laments' are the laments we read in this *maršiyah* by Saudā, for here the women grieve on their enforced march through the desert. True, for once the women are in the open desert and not in an enclosed domestic space, but that precisely is the pathos of the *maršiyah*—that those who should by rights be in seclusion and embosomed by their families, are denied this and made to wander in public view. Thus, the *maršiyah* locates itself in the specificity of gender, family relationships, and domestic settings. The emotions it exploits are often quite unambiguously womens' emotions. And the speech which corresponds to an outpouring of such emotions is pointedly un-Persianized. The emotional texture and physical location of Saudā's *maršiyah* is much closer to the *Bārahmāsā* where the laments also unfold within the walls of a home and in the company of other women. Is there a coincidence, then, between womens’

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29The vernacularized nature of the maršiyah, at both the linguistic and thematic levels, has been noted repeatedly by Urdu critics. For example, see C.M. Naim, “Urdu in the Pre-Modern Period: Synthesis or Particularism?” New Quest, 6 (February 1978), p. 9. Naim writes, “The *maršiyah* is the one genre of Urdu poetry which, as it developed, managed to maintain its original balance of local and foreign elements. In these elegies the emotions are Indian though the personae are Arabs; the landscape is conventional—sort of vintage *ghazal*—but the material culture, customs and rituals are Indo-Muslim.” Naim suggests that this is so because the maršiyah writer seeks, above all, to create a tear-jerker which will reduce the assembled Shia majlis to communal and cathartic weeping; “*maršiyahs* are written to be read before an audience in a *majlis*, and to make the listeners cry. To succeed in its chief goal a *maršiyah* has to be firmly rooted in the intimate and the local.” Thus, Naim partly anticipates my own argument; where I differ from him is in suggesting that instead of aiming generally for the local setting the maršiyah aims quite specifically for a creation of feminine sentiments and losses and that this specifically gendered set of emotions are best expressed in an unschooled vernacular speech, largely because this is what the elite Muğhal women (and especially domestic women, as opposed to *tawaifs*) would have spoken. I also differ from Naim in drawing connections between the genre of the maršiyah and other feminine-speech genres like the mašnavi by Burḥānuddin Rāz-i Ilāhi.
speech, domestic settings and the use of Hindi in certain genres of Mughal poetry? If so, then what is the relation of this literary choice to the empirical reality of Mughal culture?

III.4 Women's Speech, Hindi and Rusticity

The elite Mughal equation of Hindi with women's speech was not, I would argue, merely a literary convention. It was, instead, a fairly faithful reflection of a social reality which inclined men and women to speak at different registers of a common language--and sometimes entirely different languages altogether. We know very little of how or what elite Mughal women spoke--either among themselves or with men. And we know even less of what they wrote. We do know, however, that despite a constant trickle of immigration from Central Asia, Persian was not the language of greatest fluency for most Mughal elite women, since in the Indic environment it could only be acquired through an extended formal education with a Maulavī. The most elite among Mughal women did manage to learn Persian, and some, like Emperor Aurangzeb's daughter Zebunnisa, even became accomplished poets in it.30 But Zebunnisa quickly exhausts the list of prominent women poets

who spring to mind. This was largely because formal education required the student to attend school outside the home, while elite married (and marriageable) women were expected to observe *pardah* and remain at home.\(^{31}\)

Elite *courtesans*, however, were a different matter altogether. If we accept Muḥammad Hādī Rusvā’s celebrated novel *Umrāo Jān* as a fairly accurate description of late-Mughal education\(^{32}\) we see that for urban, elite courtesans a grounding in Persian, and especially Persian poetry, was considered *de rigeur*. For such courtesans Persian-knowing *Maulavīs* were hired and retained by the ‘brothels’ (*kotha*), thereby bringing Persian into the house, rather than sending the women out to it. Indeed, elite urban courtesans like Umrāo Jān were probably the only group of Mughal women

\(^{31}\)We see how the dilemma between educating marriageable girls while still maintaining *pardah* was solved in Naẓīr Ahmad’s novel *Taubā an-Nasūḥ* (*The Repentance of Nasūḥ*). In this nineteenth-century didactic novel Ahmad solves the problem of women’s education by having the central female character in the novel, Fahmīdah, open an all-girls’ school at her home, thereby, bringing the students into a domestic space in the presence of a married woman, rather than sending them out into the relatively more public space of a school. Significantly, if we look at the curriculum prescribed by Ahmad (and taught by Fahmīdah) we notice that Urdu is taught for practical reasons of being able to deal with life in North India, and so is some elementary Arabic (so the girls may correctly pronounce verses from the Qur’ān). Persian, however, is conspicuous by its absence, to say nothing, of course, of Persian poetry, which would have been regarded as superfluous, if not downright harmful, for girls headed for marriage. See Chaudhury Muhammad Naim, “Prize Winning *Adab*: A Study of Five Urdu Books Written in Response to the Allahabad Government Gazette Notification,” in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, edited by Barbara Metcalf, Berkeley, 1984, pp. 309-312.

\(^{32}\)Having been published in 1899 *Umrāo Jān* is not, of course, a ‘Mughal’ novel, but it is, nevertheless, a good source for recreating the social and material contexts of late-Mughal North India because the world it describes—navābī Lucknow—was such a self-conscious heir to Mughal traditions which continued well beyond the formal dismissal of the Mughal royalty by the British in 1858.
to be predictably and extensively educated in Persian. But the elite, urban courtesan was a very special type—she formed as miniscule a part of Mughal courtesan society as high-priced 'escorts' do in ours. More common, by far, were the numerous village courtesans whom Umrāo encountered when she was kidnapped and taken out of Lucknow to serve at the court of a provincial Hindu kingdom, or the even commoner type whom she described in her later life as hanging about the fair-grounds of Lucknow. In the recollection of her life-history Umrāo is very quick to point out that these courtesans were skilled in neither the musical nor the poetic arts. Nor, of course, were they adept in Persian, or even in Persianized Urdu. They were, quite simply, sex-workers, from whom the customers expected neither the pleasure of witty conversation nor the challenge of poetic exchanges.

In Rusvā’s novel we detect two distinct gradations of speech—elite urban men and courtesans display their virtuosity by speaking and writing Persian, or an elaborately Persianized Urdu, while domestic women—like Umrāo’s mother in Faizābād, and later her lover’s wife in Lucknow—talk in a variety of unstandardized vernacular dialects with a minimum of Persian. So, although a handful of Mughal women from royal families or elite courtesan ‘families’ did write and compose in Persian, it largely remained the domain of educated men. In fact, throughout Mughal history, and well into the nineteenth-century, a command of Persian was the mark of an educated man, whether Hindu or Muslim. Thus, by retelling the Hindi Pādmāvat in high
Persian Mukhlis was not just transporting the tale into a register acceptable to
his literary friends, he was also bolstering his own reputation as a man of
letters, and possibly competing with his friend, the great lexicographer
Sirājuddīn Khān Ārzū, who was also present that sleepless night at the
fairgrounds.

By contrast in Mughal culture the un-Persianized vernacular—often
simply called ‘bhākhā’, or ‘speech’—was associated with women. And I
would add that its strongest association was not just with any women, but
especially with married and, thus, house-bound women. It is because this
association was already widely prevalent that numerous late-nineteenth
century proponents of Hindi could glorify the language by personifying it as
a virtuous house-wife, while vilifying Urdu as a harlot in their attempts at
promoting the one over the other as the national language.\(^{34}\) The association
of an un-Persianized vernacular with virtuous domesticity is already implied
in Mughal texts like Sauda’s marsiyah where Fatima’s domesticity is fully
highlighted by her pointed avoidance of Perso-Arabic words. Would her

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\(^{33}\) Which is in itself a tadbhavized form of the Sanskrit ‘Bhāśā’ and thus hints at the
tadbhava nature of this vernacular. Thus, for example, early publications of Padmāvat are
titled “Padmāvat Bhākhā” “Padmāvat in the vernacular”. See Padmāvat: Bhākhā Mutarjim,
translated by Muhammad ‘Abdūl Vāhid Ghafarallāh, Kanpur, 1905. For other earlier uses of
this word to refer to an un-Persianized language see Phukan, Through a Persian Prism, p. 129

\(^{34}\) And not just as the virtuous house-wife, but also as ‘Queen-Abode- of Truth’,
opposed to Urdu as the ruthless rival for the throne. For glorious representations of Hindi
(and negative ones of Urdu) in late-nineteenth century literature see Christopher King,
“Forging a New Linguistic Identity: The Hindi Movement in Banaras, 1868-1914,” in Culture
laments have had the same ring of helplessness or outrage if Saudā had made her cry in the same polished, Persianized speech in which gender-less lovers and beloveds lisped to each other in his ghazals? As with the association of Hindi and musicality, this particular association with women has also had a long life, persisting well into the twentieth-century. Many North Indians brought up in pre-partition South Asia still remember that until quite recently Hindi was called ‘auraton kī zabān’, or ‘the womens’ language,’ and that those who so called it intended a contrast with the vastly more Persianized Urdu.

The un-Persianized vernacular, or bhākhā, was not, however, a uniform thing. It too was graded, and one of its nuances was a very specialized idiom called The 'Begamāṭī zabān' or 'lady's jargon'. Begamāṭī zabān distinguished itself most conspicuously through its unique stock of curse words, diminutives and terms of endearment. A word such as 'mūā' ('corpse') could be hurled at someone intensely disliked, and would immediately identify the speaker as using Begamāṭī zabān. As such Begamāṭī zabān extended the emotional reach of language, by making it possible to express greater extremes of both love and hatred, affection and annoyance. But it is significant that only women had the prerogative of using its unique vocabulary. A man using a word such as 'mūā' could count on being laughed

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at for being effeminate. Thus, if un-Persianized Hindi was women's speech ('auraton ki zabān), Begamāṭī zabān was the very heart of this speech—the inner core from which men were not just discouraged, but actively barred.

Predictably, Begamāṭī zabān was neither Persianized nor Arabicized. What little Persian or Arabic it did have was pronounced—or according some 'mispronounced'—, with the Persian 'z's' changing to 'j's' and the 'khs' to 'khs'. It was this special subset of speech, and its many 'mispronunciations' of Perso-Arabic sounds, which late 19th-century Muslim reformers like Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānāvī sought to correct in his didactic book Bihishti Zevār (Heavenly Ornaments).36 And it is precisely this change of pronunciation in Persian words that is also evident in those passages of Afzal's poem where the nāyikā speaks in Hindi. But unlike the Begams who spoke the Begamāṭī zabān, Afzal's nāyikā surprises us by breaking out in chaste Persian and, in one instance, even Arabic. And when she does so we get the distinct impression that were she to walk out of the pages of the text her diction and pronunciation would meet with the approval of any Maulāna.

As a technical term 'Begamāṭī zabān' is usually reserved for nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century women's speech. However, since

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36 Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānāvī, Perfecting Women: Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānāvī's Bihishti Zevār, translated by Barbara Daly Metcalf, Berkeley, 1990. See especially p. 321 where the Maulānā promotes the Arabic words for the four directions (mashriq, maghrib) over the tadbhavized Hindi ones (pūrab, pacchim).
the peculiar social conditions which produced a distinct 'lady's jargon' were not unique to the nineteenth-century, I would assert that a similar gender-based cleavage also existed in the two prior centuries of Mughal culture, with women speaking a medley of unstandardized, and usually unnamed, local dialects with a thin veneer of Persian--and an even thinner one of Arabic. In our contemporary jargon we tend to group such unstandardized, un-Persianized dialects under the rubric of 'Hindi'--though it is quite far from the official Hindi of post-Independence India, which carries an increasingly crushing load of unmodified Sanskrit words.

In the eighteenth-century Saudā called such un-Persianized women's speech 'the eastern dialect,' thereby hinting that the eastern reaches of the Gangetic plain--being furthest removed from Delhi and Lucknow--the two centers of Persianate culture--spoke a language less Persianized. For a Mughal intellectual like Saudā Afżal's incursion into an un-Persianized 'Hindi' might well have connoted 'popular' speech, but for him its efficacy would not have consisted in its orientation towards the rural Hindu masses, but, rather, in its vivid evocation of a rustic and unschooled women's dialect which all Mughal elites heard at home, especially in the women's quarter.

While savouring the rusticity of un-Persianized speech in writing its highly-educated, Persianized, male readers would have been under no illusions as to who this literature was intended for. Neither Afżal, nor Rāzī, not yet Saudā breathed the air of a liberal world which deemed outreach to
the masses in their vernacular the burden of the noble intellectual. To imagine this Hindi literature as demotic in its intended audience is to foreclose the possibility of a sophisticated, Persianized male taking delight in reading a rustic, unacademic speech that he himself seldom spoke publicly, and which he would certainly not have deigned to write to his intellectual equals, whether they were male colleagues or educated courtesans. Afzal’s genius as a poet lay in his surprising juxtaposition of this vernacular (bhākhā) with a chaste Persian in the laments of a grieving woman. His text delighted Muḥgal readers because it defied their expectations, not because they found its Hindi easier to understand, nor yet because they could use it as an effective means of communicating with the Hindu masses.

The conception of the vernacular as the ‘voice of the people’ or in service of ‘the people’ is best viewed as a trope in our own modern consciousness. But for the study of pre-modern literature it is a disabling trope, and one that needs to be historicized and questioned. To do this it helps to begin with the realization that the glorification of the vernacular as ‘voice of the people’ is a conception that serves the social ideals of the founders and members of modern nation states. Throughout the nineteenth-century, and continuing up to the present, the logic of nationalism seizes upon language—and especially the vernacular as opposed to the classical language—as an essential building block of a shared national identity; so much so, that Benedict Anderson’s description of a nation as a ‘vernacularly imagined
community\textsuperscript{37} seems particularly apt. And one characteristic of 'vernacularly imagined communities' is their unfailing celebration of the \textit{vernaculus}, the native-born. In modern narratives of nationalism," writes Sumathi Ramaswamy, "the language of a nation assumes importance because it is the tongue of its citizens, the very essence of the people who speak it. Correspondingly, the power of the language appears to derive from the power exercised by the collective entity, "the people" in the nation."\textsuperscript{38}

With Mughal culture, however, we step into a radically different ethical and intellectual terrain. As we enter this landscape we have, above all, to bear in mind that we are visiting a culture before the advent of the nation, and a time before egalitarian national philosophies came to celebrate the 'folk' as the very marrow of the nation, and so to court them as the indispensable element of the emerging state. Whether Hindu or Muslim, the Persianized urban elite of Mughal India did not conceive of themselves in 'vernacular terms'--which is to say that they did not value their written or spoken language according to its proximity to the speech of the masses. Nor did they view mass-accessibility as a measure of literary success. But at the same time


\textsuperscript{38} By contrast, she writes: "Prior to the nation's birth, Tamil was valorized not because it ensured communication between its speakers, enabled the schooling of its citizenry, or facilitated the governance of the populace. Instead, it was held in awe for its demonstrated ability to perform wondrous miracles and command the all-powerful gods."
their overwhelmingly elite outlook did not translate simply and literally into an avoidance of the vernacular, or even its strict separation from high classical Persian. Those elites who enthusiastically participated in Persianized art forms, and exclusively maintained their social distance from the masses, nevertheless used an un-Persianized Hindi for special occasions, such as, for example, when they wanted to evoke a self-consciously rustic, domestic and feminized register of speech. Thus in discussing Mughal literature we should be alert to the literary possibilities of the combinations of Persian and the vernacular, while at the same time explaining these combinations in a way that does not presume an egalitarian sensibility.\(^{39}\) To fail to do this is to bury this literature and its users within the graveyard of our own ideals.

Let us emerge from this forest of details to reconsider the issue of literary identities in Mughal India. What I have just presented suggests, I

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\(^{39}\) The anachronistic imposition of our own vernacular ideals to pre-modernity is a distortion which is alive and well in the study of South Asia. One glaring example of such historiography is Sudipto Kaviraj's attempts at outlining a logic of writing and and speaking in pre-modern India. In writing of the rise of vernacular literatures he says: "They [i.e. vernacular literatures] arise haltingly, always making reverential genuflexions in the direction of the high tradition and its texts, which they were eventually to undermine. Their first and most impressive texts are attempts to stretch the riches of this high culture towards the lower, culturally deprived orders. Their implicit justification would have been that, if religiosity and aesthetics were significant and valuable for all human beings, those without the use of Sanskrit [or Persian?] should not be deprived of these values. As a result these literatures assume a consciously subaltern relation between themselves and the high classical texts," in "Writing, Speaking, Being: Language and the Historical Formation of Identities in India," in Nationalstat und Sprachkonflikte in Sud und Sudostasien, edited by Dietmar Rothermund, Stuttgart, 1992, pp. 33-4.
hope, the barest outlines of a logic of language use--enough of an outline to allow me to propose that for elite, Persianized Mughals Hindi usage was, among other things, a matter of aesthetic considerations. The aesthetic of Hindi usage was often linked to its perceived rusticity, which, in turn connoted an unschooled, feminine voice. It was thus that both the rustic femininity of Hindi and the urbane masculinity of Persian were thrown into sharper relief when contained in the voice of the grieving nāyikā. Thus the resulting narrative could appeal more fully to the sensibilities of an elite Persianized reader like Mukhliš, who on the one hand deemed Persian the language of refinement--and so strove in his public life to claim its profile and status--, but who simultaneously succumbed to the rhythm of eastern dialects, as might the heart upon hearing a "melody brimming with pain."

The social gradations instrumental in shaping the emotive and expressive contours of Hindi and Persian are not, of course, the same today as they were in Mughal India. Perhaps the biggest change is that it is no longer the Persianate, but rather the international Anglophone culture that sets the trend and commands the greatest prestige. Far from being the primary choice for bureaucratic and literary texts, Persian has ceased to be a viable choice for self-expression of any kind in South Asia. Its bureaucratic and official functions have been usurped by English, as has its status as the language of literary expression for an elite minority.

Nor is Hindi the same unnamed and unstandardized collection of local dialects it was in Mughal India. With its promotion to the national stage in
early-twentieth century Hindi was invested with a degree of self-confidence which is perhaps overweening in light of its effective marginalization in all practical aspects of life by English. Nonetheless, it has been fashioned into a national icon, so that in the increasingly belligerent logic of Indian self-definition it is the patriotic language—a third of the Holy Trinity which has as its other members Hindu and Hindustan. And like khādi (handspun-cotton), that other icon of national definition, Hindi also clothes and covers the aspiring politician.

One can catalogue the many changes in the status of both Hindi and Persian, but the question which evolves out of the previous discussion is whether or not it is possible to talk of an ecology of South Asian languages in which Hindi and Persian actively engage each other as significant players. Is it not, instead, the case that in contemporary South Asian reality the very juxtaposition of the two languages is merely an academic one? It is difficult to refute this, for nowhere in contemporary South Asia do Hindi and Persian face each other as directly or creatively as they did in the imagination of Saudā, Afzal or Burḥānuddin. The two have become unknowing neighbours.

But I will frame the question another way. Let us ask if the Persianate literary sensibility that empowered Hindi to express the domestic, familial and feminine emotions entirely a thing of the past? Or do vestiges of it remain, not in Persian, of course, but in Urdu—the most direct inheritor of Muḥāl culture and thus of a Persianate sensibility? In other words, when Hindi and Urdu confront each other in the imagination of contemporary Urdu poets then how is Hindi valorized? Here is one response to Hindi
which speaks most directly to its feminizing function in a contemporary Persianate environment.

The example I have selected to illustrate the continuity in the Persianate literary stance towards Hindi is a maršiyah by the Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz whose literary career spans most of mid- and late twentieth-century. With the possible exception of Iqbal Faiz, is the most popular contemporary poet among Urdu readers in both India and Pakistan. His fame rests on his ghazals and nazms, not on his maršiyahs. However, in the aftermath of the Arab-Palestinian war of 1967 Faiz published a collection called Sar-i vādī-ye Sinā (The Edge of the Valley of Sinai). In this collection is a modern maršiyah entitled ‘sipāhī kā maršiyah,’ (a soldier’s maršiyah). On the first glance it is a plain title, but ultimately the title jars because of the mundane feel of the word ‘sipāhī’ (soldier). This is a far cry from the sacred elegies about the martyrs of Karbalā, who were not describable in terms as bald as ‘sipāhī’. And the effect of this ‘baldness’ is to point us away from the sacred landscape of Karbalā, and to land us in the mundane reality of Palestine where this elegy is sung, presumably, by a Palestinian mother grieving her dead soldier-son. But notice the language in which she speaks:

Ütho ab māṭī se utūtho  
Jāgo mere lāl...  
Tumri sej sajāvan kāran  
dekho aśī rain andhiyāri...  
ghar ghar bikhrā bhor kā kundan  
ghor andhiyārā apnā āngan  

Rise now from earth
Wake up, my son
to deck your bed
dark night has come
Just look my son
dawn strews its gold in every home
Pitch black remains my garden.

Faiz’s elegy is nothing like Sauda’s. The biggest difference between this lament and the classical Urdu maršiyah is in the specificity of the speaker’s identity. Here it is neither Zainab, nor Fātimah, nor any of the known characters in the classical maršiyah, but simply an unnamed mother who weeps for an unnamed soldier. And because the maršiyah is not rooted in Karbalā it must necessarily lack the allusions to the lush scenarios and events which a classical maršiyah writer could confidently evoke with a quick turn of phrase because the audience already knew them. Thus Faiz’s maršiyah has a thinness of detail and no historical allusions beyond those hinted by its inclusion in a collection written as a response to the Arab-Palestinian war. It is unrooted, except in the context of a mother-son relation.

The one similarity with Sauda’s maršiyah, however, is the register in which the grieving Palestinian mother speaks to her dead son. Not only is there a proliferation of tadbhava words—sej, kāran, bhor, anḏhiyārā--, and the complete avoidance of Persian and Arabic words, but Faiz also omits postpositions, as in the line ‘tumrī sej saǰāvan kāran,’ where the ‘ke’ is left out altogether. Such omissions are common in regional Hindi dialects, and especially in poetry, but are not permissible in the grammar of either Urdu or
Khařī boḷī. The logic which led Saudā to slip into a Hindi register when reporting a woman’s speech was still available to Faiz in 1968.41

III.5 Vāleḥ Dāghostānī: Conversion in the Mughal Imaginaire

So far I have addressed explanations which view Persianate Hindi literature as populist in inspiration and use. Such explanations invariably isolate one prominent use for an allegedly populist Hindi literature—they claim that the masses addressed by this literature were not only un-Persianized, but also non-Muslim, so that this demotic literature was simultaneously conversionary in its effects. If, as I have demonstrated, the issue of language use had much to do with the logic of aesthetic considerations, and not merely with the logic of ‘practical’ matters, then it behooves us to ask how an issue like ‘conversion’ functioned within this logic. Put another way, what were the associations of ‘conversion’ in the

41 And, I would argue, it continues to be available to even more recent Urdu poets, such as Fahmīda Riyāż, when, in a very conscious departure from the conventions of the ghazal, she writes love poetry in an explicitly feminine voice. See, for example her ‘Sājan ham to kurtā tumhār: ‘Dear, I am but your kurtē,’ in which a woman who is no longer loved speaks to her absent lover using, yet again, a ḍabhavīd idiom largely shorn of Persian and Arabic words. Unlike Saudā and Faiz, Riyāż does use some Arabic vocabulary, but she pointedly misspells them: jo bītā hai is tan man par/kahūn to kaun kare ḍūbār (instead of ‘aṭībār): That which this mind and body have suffered / who’ll bailieve, if ever I tell?
Mughal literary imagination? To arrive at these associations or meanings we have to approach conversion not just as a historical process, but also as a literary trope. To understand conversion literarily we again look at Bikat Kahāni or, rather, at a Mughal reaction to it.

The reaction to Afżal is by the Persian poet Vāleh Dāghestānī (d. 1756), who in the 1730’s compiled a biographical sketch of Indian poets writing in Persian (Riyāz al-Shuʿarā). In the section on Afżal we see Vāleh grappling with the anomaly of a Persian-knowing elite Mughal poet choosing to write in Hindi. Vāleh explained Afżal’s motivation by constructing, a biography which portrays Afżal as a convert to Vaishnāvism:

His [i.e., Afżal’s] profession was teaching and a large number of students was included in his circle. Many benefited from him. When he was old he fell into a Hindu woman’s snare, and was so gone on her that saying farewell to both prayers and other religious exercises he began circumambulating the beloved’s alley instead of the mosque and the madrasah. In those days of passion and waywardness (vāraftagī) the Maulānā composed many romantic (āshiqānah) ghazals...

Gradually the woman’s relatives heard of the Maulānā’s infatuation and passion, and the woman was defamed through no fault of her own. The poor woman secluded herself altogether, to the point that she would not step out of the house even on festivals. Despairing of catching a glimpse of his beloved the Maulānā ensconced himself all the more firmly in the alley of the beloved [kūcā-ye yār]. Finally, tired of all of this, her relatives packed her off to Mathurā to stay with some friends.

When the Maulānā found out that she had been sent to Mathurā, then weeping and wailing, he too set off for Mathurā, and reaching the city he continued his search for her. One day by sheer chance the woman went out for an outing with her friends, and saw the Maulānā approaching
her head-on. The second he saw her he leapt forward and recited this couplet [in Persian]:

khushā rūsvāī o hāl-i tabāhī
sar-i rāhī, o āhī, o nigāhī.

On the path of love, and sighs and glimpses
Blessed be all infamy and devastation.

God only knows if that woman understood even a word of the couplet, but she reacted to it with a red-hot temper. Flaring up she cried, “O Maulavī, aren’t you ashamed that your beard has turned completely white, and yet you babble of love to a young woman?” And the Maulānā was indeed abashed, but the evil-spirit of love, which sat crouching on his mind, would not budge an inch. So, to lure that genie into a bottle he concocted such a plan as no one has ever dreamt of in their wildest imagination. He had his beard shaved off.

He put on the sacred thread around his neck, and taking on the guise of a Brahmin, he apprenticed himself to a temple priest. Day and night he served the priest devotedly, and busied himself in acquiring the Indian sciences (ʿulūm-i Hindi). Being intelligent he made astonishing progress in Hindi in just a short while. The Brahmin chose him as his deputy in the temple and, eventually, on his death-bed he selected him [i.e. Afzal] as his successor to priesthood.

In just a few days the Maulavī won over the hearts of all people, and to such an extent that they followed him unquestioningly. This temple used to celebrate an annual festival to which the women would make a special point of coming. When that day finally came around and groups of women began entering the temple with offerings for pūjā, the Maulānā’s beloved also came with offerings. When her turn came to kiss the priest’s feet, he stopped her and said, “Do you recognize me at all?” The woman raised her head and looked intently at the priest and recognized him. But such a matter was beyond her comprehension—that a Muslim Maulavi should sit and offer prayers at a Hindu temple. She was flustered, scared and simply transfixed by him. Finally, she said, “You have suffered much for such a worthless woman; whatever has happened has happened but for the future I promise to be your dependent [tabdār].
Finally, that woman became a Muslim and his wife. The Maulānā died in the year 1035 hijri.  

The implication of this biography is that Afżal’s Hindi verses date to his period of obsession with the Hindu woman and his consequent immersion in the Vaishnava culture. The question, of course, is how are we to navigate our way through this biography. Clearly, to read it as a factual account of Afżal’s life would be naive; equally naive, however, would be to dismiss it as merely a fanciful tale, for while it may tell us nothing of the actual circumstances of Afżal’s life it speaks quite eloquently of a Mughal intellectual’s grasp of the issue of writing in Hindi, and its relation to the issue of conversion. The paradigm of conversion which Vāleḥ followed in constructing his biography of Afżal is a trope encountered frequently in Šūfī hagiographies, most conspicuously in Farīdūddīn ‘Attār’s 13th-century Persian masterpiece, the Conference of the Birds. In The Conference ‘Attār relates the story of a certain Shaikh San’an who falls in love with a Christian woman, and in blind obedience to her becomes a swineherd, thereby forfeiting his status as a Muslim Shaikh. He plunges further into kufr (disbelief) by donning the cap and belt of the Christians. Eventually, however, he returns to the Muslim community.  

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In the inversionary logic of Şūfi paradigms the lover’s path to true knowledge and union with the beloved lies through immersion in the darkness of disbelief and the resultant public censure, or malāmat. It is through his patient endurance of this censure that the true lover proves his resolve. Thus, it is no accident that in the biography Vāleh shows Afżal bursting out in couplets which praise infamy and destruction as a blessing on the suffering lover. From the Şūfi point of view the courting of public censure as a result of abandoning Islam makes yet another significant point: it establishes a tension between conventional religious observances and the intuitive grasp of Truth which a Şūfi attains after enduring hardships, and which often leads him to act in outlandish ways. Of course, for a Şūfi the unveiling of Truth through union with the beloved takes precedence over slavish conformity to the rules of religious ritual; it is this hierarchy of values that the Şūfi-lover establishes through becoming an outcast to the Muslim community. But the foray into disbelief is only an intermediate step, for—partly in response to orthodox critiques—Şūfis also recognized that the truly successful mystic should ultimately be capable of containing himself to the point of maintaining the external decorum required of all social beings. Thus, while the first flash of esoteric knowledge may indeed cause the Şūfi to lose his wits, ultimately the ecstasy has to be contained. It is thus that both Shaikh Sanān and Afżal return to the Muslim community.

When Vāleh constructs the biography of Afżal on the Şūfi paradigm of the wayward but true lover, he hints that Afżal’s linguistic exclusion from the community of Persian-writing poets parallels the self-exclusion of the Şūfi
from the community of conventional Muslims. Thus the biographer casts the poet's persona within the mould of an ideal Şūfi. Like Shaikh Sanān, Afzal also emerges the better for this foray into disbelief (kufr). In the logic of Vāleh's imagination the Hindi which Afzal chose to write was a product of the excess of love which blinded him temporarily to the path of both the conventional Muslim and the conventional Persian poet. But this temporary turning away from convention was not just progress on the path of errors, it was, instead, the necessary first step to gaining an intimate knowledge of the beloved. Thus for Vāleh Afzal's choice to write in Hindi was not a concession to the simple sensibility of rural non-educated Hindus, but rather the necessary outcome of a stage along the lover's path, which the lyric poet also treaded.

Vāleh must have been thoroughly aware that his inclusion of Afzal in a biography of Indian Persian poets was questionable, since Afzal's only composition was a hybrid Hindi-Persian poem. Thus, by including Afzal in his biographical compendium Vāleh was in a sense offering a defense of Afzal's choice to write in Hindi. In the logic of this defense Hindi was presented as proof of Afzal's profoundly transforming experience of love--an experience which presumably rendered his love poetry all the more potent, for it was now no mere lisping about love, but proceeded, instead, from a solid core of experience.

Like Eaton and 'Abdul Haq, Vāleh also explained the choice of Hindi by an elite, Persian-knowing poet in terms of an interaction between Hindus and Muslims--but with a twist. In Vāleh's explanation the movement is
reversed—it is not the Muslim poet who addresses the potential convert in his simple idiom; instead, the Muslim poet becomes a Hindu to speak in the Hindu’s idiom.

Can we, then, say that Vāleḥ talks of a conversion? Only, I believe, if we take care to note the difference between what he and we mean by ‘conversion’. By conversion Vāleḥ seems to have meant a good deal more than merely the shifting of allegiances from this community of believers to that. Conversion may indeed mean that, but for Vāleḥ the more interesting conversion was the initiation of the poet, and presumably also the reader, into the transformative possibilities of the path of love. Hindi and immersion in Hinduism were merely the external signs of such a ‘conversion’. In contrast to modern interpreters like Eaton or ‘Abdul Ḥaq, Vāleḥ did not understand Afzal’s choice of Hindi exclusively within the binary framework of a Hindu-Muslim interaction, or as a strictly historical process. The conversion which Vāleḥ sketches presumes a rather different load of commitment, and is oriented towards a very different debate than what we in the late twentieth-century mean when we talk of ‘conversion’. For one, Vāleḥ’s conversion was not an apocalyptic event leading to an estrangement from an original confessional community; it was a liminal moment in the process of self-integration; as such it lacked the finality which for us is a defining characteristic of ‘religious conversion.’

Secondly, in terms of its intellectual grounding Afzal’s conversion echoed an age-old debate within the Islamic tradition—the debate, that is, between a strictly legalist position and a Šūfī mystical position on the
persistent tension between public decorum and religious ecstasy. This debate had been rehearsed before and elsewhere in the Islamic world—such as by 'Attār writing in thirteenth-century Iran of Shaikh Sanān’s conversion to Christianity. Thus, the rhetorical effect of constructing Afzal’s persona as a Śūfi heretic (kāfir) was to root Bikat Kahānī within a venerable debate internal to the Muslim community. To be sure this ongoing Islamic debate in both its South Asian and Middle Eastern variants cast a side-long glance at non-Muslims. In 'Attār’s case the glance rests on Christians; in the bulk of Persian ghazal poetry it is the wine-drinking Zoroastrians dwelling at the fringes of the city who express the liminal identity of the reprobate lover; and in Vāleh’s case the bearer of the liminal identity is the Hindu Vaishnava priest. Certainly all of these accounts tell us something about the relation between Muslims and the various non-Muslims, but they do more than just this; they also voice tensions within the Muslim community.
CHAPTER FOUR

MANLY MAIDENS AND HUMbled KINGS:
POLITICAL USES OF SAIṬ

Gulī bakhsh as gulistān-i khalīlam
dar in rah sāz ātīsh rā dāfīlam
Grant me, God, a petal from Abraham’s Garden
That its fire may lead me on life’s dark journey.
Nau‘ī of Khabūshān

IV.1 Thematically Hybrid Muḥgal Literature

Like the curlews which moved Dylan Thomas on the Welsh estuary, the Muḥgal poets I have discussed also spoke “through throats where many rivers meet.” In so doing they created a polyphony perhaps richer than any in most of the Islamicate world. But even within the field of Muḥgal literature the polyphony of Afẓal’s or Rāz-i Ilāhī’s macaronic verse is relatively unusual, for most Persian-knowing authors in the orbit of the elite Muḥgal
culture chose to write *exclusively* in Persian—and, furthermore, in a Persian that was scarcely discernible from the Persian of Bukhara, Herat, Shiraz or, straying further, even the Ottoman court at Istanbul. It was this preference for a standardized Persian, and its resultant monophony, that makes it possible for us to speak meaningfully of an international Persianate culture emerging about the middle of the twelfth century and encompassing not only Iran and Northern India, but eventually also Ottoman Turkey, and the Turkic speaking regions of Būkhārā and Samarqand.

One attitude that made this monophony possible was a studied *lack of response* to the many local variations of Persian that flourished in this vast region. A poet like Sāib could move from his native Tabrez in Western Iran to Turkey, Herat, and eventually Delhi, confident of patronage, and without ever letting the colors of local Persian intrude upon his style, diction or imagery¹. Indeed it was a confident lack of response to the many local Persians that lent weight, gravity and legitimacy to the style of an internationally successful Persian poet. Needless to say, in a world where even the many local Persians were regarded coolly, the other local languages, like Hindavi, stood no chance of being acknowledged by or admitted into the circle of literary speech. To fully appreciate the polyphony of Afzal’s or Rāz-i Ilāhī’s macaronic poems one must eventually see them in juxtaposition to the

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¹See Aziz Ahmad, “Safavid Poets and India,” in *Iran* 14 (1976), pp. 117-132. Ahmad states that the “attitudes of Safavid immigrant poets to India range from enthusiastic nostalgia to bitter dislike.” But whatever their attitude I am speaking here of their diction and style; and this does not seem to have changed as a result of their newfound patrons in Mughal India.
vaster outpouring of Mughal literature which is doggedly monophonic, and 'untainted' by the local. This aversion to the local is more than just an expected feature of international styles, it is their *sine qua non*.²

Having dwelt, therefore, at length on macaronic verse as an index of the Mughal Persianate response to the Indic culture I must at last offer a corrective, lest it be imagined that in the cosmopolitan culture of Mughal India all poets were busy writing simultaneously in many languages. The macaronic verse of Afzal, Rāz-i Ilāhī, Saudā and others begs our attention for it is a bit of an anomaly.

But if the elite Persianate response to India was only infrequently expressed in the stark hybridity of macaronic verse, there was another kind of hybridity that was commoner. This hybridity that is harder to name, but let me suggest the term 'thematic hybridity'. To understand what I mean by this in the specific context of an inter-cultural response, it helps to begin with the recognition that the imagery of much elite Mughal literature is entirely *unrooted* in the Indian sub-continent. One might well expect such a lack of response to the Indian environment by immigrant poets like Ṣāib, who sojourned in India for brief periods, and whose relentless nostalgia for Iran ensured that they never seriously engaged the Indian landscape. But what is intriguing about elite Mughal literature is that even *Indian* born Mughal poets composed Persian verse that uses no Indian derived imagery. This is

²I am indebted here to Sheldon Pollock who raises a similar point about international and regional styles, but with reference to Sanskrit and Kannada, in his “India in the Vernacular Millenium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000-1500,” Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences 127.3 (1998), pp. 41-75. See, especially, p. 50.
especially the case in the genre of the ghazal where one sees the same springflowering meadows, the same warbling nightingales, and the same fiercely cold autumn winds as in Safavi or Ottoman lyrics. And it is not just the physical setting that conjures up a temperate elsewhere but also the allusive setting, as the beloveds in the ghazal are routinely compared to Joseph, and epiphanies to that of Moses on Mount Sinai. India is all but banished from both the physical and allusive world of much Muḥgal Persian literature. It is this attitude of holding at bay all that is local which distinguishes Persianate culture as an international culture. And it is precisely an active interest in the local that makes Padmāvat a notable contrast to the bulk of literature enjoyed by the Persian-knowing Muḥgal literati. Unlike that other literature, Padmāvat refuses to transport its readers to vernal meadows and autumnravaged gardens. It is not the fragile tulip that blooms in the groves of Padmāvat but rather the robust mango.

Of course, when Jāyasī chose to write Padmāvat in a dialect of Hindi he chose more than just a language—for with a language one inherits its physical universe. In other words, one may argue that the rootedness of Padmāvat in the Indian landscape is dictated in large measure by Jayasi’s choice of Hindi. While this is true in the case of Jāyasī’s Padmāvat it cannot so neatly be argued for other Muḥgal texts which were composed in Persian, but nevertheless rooted firmly in an Indic physical, social and mythic world. For example, Rāzī’s Shamʿ, a macaronic Perso-Hindi retelling of Jāyasī’s Padmāvat, is one text where the transposition of most of the tale into Persian does not correspond to a Persianization of imagery. But an even starker
example of an indicized Mughal text is the fully Persian Soz o Gudāz (Burning and Melting,) by the Jahāngirī court poet Nau‘ī Ḵhabūshānī. In Soz Nau‘ī creates an unusual juxtaposition of Persian language with an Indic social setting when he presents a Hindu bride’s admirable resolve to commit satī for her lover, despite the counsel of King Akbar. Within the powerful current of an international Persianate literary taste such authors as Rāzī and Nau‘ī present something anomalous—a willingness to override the elite bias for Persianized themes, settings and imagery in favour of the Indic. It is this occasional attitude that resulted in a body of Mughal texts which we may call thematically hybrid. And to the extent that such narratives appear anomalous to us we may ask what kind of an intercultural response is implied by them. What, also, is the stance taken by the Mughal poet who innovates within the strict parameters of a Persianate taste by straying into the Indic?

There are, of course, as many ways of Indicizing a narrative as there are narratives. It helps, then, to identify a related cluster of themes or images around which to build a discussion of the Persianate literary response to India. Both Rāzī and Nau‘ī used satī to ground their poems in India, as did Jāyasī when he used the mass satī of Rājpūt widows to create a stunning closure to his narrative. Again, it was satī that served in travelers’ accounts (like Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s) to point to that quintessentially Hindu practice confronted by which the astounded traveler may gauge his distance from the familiar or the morally permissible. In many ways satī was the portal opening onto the mythic and moral landscape of India—the element which grounded a Persianate narrative unmistakably and spectacularly in the Indian soil.
It is commonsensical to propose that the creative use of Indic themes and imagery—especially legally controversial ones like *sati*—by elite Mughal authors offers a particularly good window into the dialogue between a Persianate and an Indic imaginaire, and beginning from this assumption to allege that when Persianized Muslim elites represent *sati* sympathetically they betray an open and generous stance to their Hindu social environment. Understood thus, Rāzī and Nauī become emblems of a dialogue not just between the Indic and the Persianate, but more pointedly between the Hindu and the Muslim sensibilities—examples of that alleged intermingling of two religious traditions which happened at a particularly expansive moment of Indian history—the golden age of the Mughals.

It is precisely this commonsensical interpretation of thematically hybrid Mughal verse that I question and expand upon in this and the next chapter. Did the many literary representations of *sati* by Mughal Muslim authors necessarily imply a liberal Muslim accommodation of the Hindu imaginaire? Or did they serve, instead, a more specific rhetorical function internal to the politics and aesthetics of the Mughal courtly and Şūfi communities? Are narratives like Rāzī’s praise of *sati* instances of the Persianate culture’s stance towards a curious Hindu custom, or did they serve to sharpen the point of metaphysical debates *internal to* the Mughal Şūfi community? Must we see Nauī’s discourse as simply a Mughal Muslim’s posture towards the strangely compelling Hindu practice of *sati*, or did Nauī use *sati* to serve another ideological end—the definition of the limits of royal authority vis a vis other kinds of authority? In other words, do
thematically hybrid texts serve the sole function of opening the window onto the dialogue between Hindus and Muslims, or were there other issues in Mughal social, religious and literary culture that were addressed by authors like Rāzī and Naušī when they chose to ignore the prevailing bias for the Persianate and favoured, in stead, an Indic theme and setting? In this chapter I will those uses of Indic themes by Mughal Muslim poets which offer us a glimpse into the political and social attitudes and agendas of both the poets and their patrons, while in the next chapter I will examine the specifically theological uses of indic themes by Mughal poets.

In the previous two chapters I had argued that issues in language choice which seem to the modern glance to be reflective of an interaction between Mughal Sūfis and Hindus turn out, instead, to be about the selection of a language appropriate to the expression of religious epiphany, feminine sentiments, domesticity and rusticity. Thus, a choice which from our modern vantage point seemed to be dictated by the confrontational politics of religious identities may actually have been dictated by aesthetics. In this chapter I will argue a similar point, but now with respect to the choice of Indic themes and images, rather than languages.

IV.2 Jāyasi’s World: Savage Tigers and Prophets of Unity

In the introduction we saw that thematically hybrid texts like Pādmāvat have been viewed as indices of a remarkable religious liberalism.
Thus A.G. Shirreff, the English translator of *Padminavat*, glimpsed in its hybridity the evidence of such an exemplary transcendence of sectarian differences that he named Muḥammad Jāyasī a “prophet of unity.” Given the contemporary climate of sober understatement Shirreff’s exaltation of Jāyasī may sound baroque, but in its essence this is an assessment that is neither rare nor passé. We have already seen another more recent example of such an assessment in Maulavi ‘Abdul Haq’s portrait of the frontier Ṣūfis peacefully ministering to the folk. Indeed, ‘unitive’ or ‘pacific’ portraits of medieval Ṣūfis persist with enough frequency that we may well call them a common trope in our own understanding of medieval culture.

We see a less poetic, but essentially similar, interpretation of Ṣūfī responses to Hindus in the work of Muzaffar ‘Alam when he attributes the alleged intellectual generosity of the Avadhi Ṣūfis to the influence of the monistic philosophy of *Vahdat al-Vujūd* (Unity of Being)—a school of Islamic philosophy which takes the writings of the thirteenth-century Andalusian philosopher Ibn al ‘Arabi as its inspiration, and argues for a radical essential unity of Self and Other.⁴ *Vahdat al-Vujūd* has enjoyed a venerable history both in and outside India, and has appealed especially to a number of Ṣūfis, among them Sayyad Ashraf Jahāṅgīr Simnānī, to whose lineage Muḥammad Jāyasī belonged. ‘Alam points out that Jahāṅgīr Simnānī was the primary

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proponent of this philosophy, and in fact, he was responsible for its introduction to Avadh in the fifteenth century. In accordance with the radically monistic tenets of this philosophy, says ʿAlam, “Simnānī popularized the use of the expression hamā ʿust (He is all), thus emphasizing the belief that anything other than God did not exist.” The result of this support for the doctrine of monism was “a practice of generous accommodativeness [sic.] to the local social beliefs and customs” of the Hindu population. This prevailing climate of generosity, continues ʿAlam, found its “fascinating expression in mid 16th century” in a remarkable literary output, such as, for example, ʿAbdul Vāhid Bilgrāmī’s Ḥaqāiq-i Hindi (Indian Verities), a text in which the author “sought to reconcile Vaishnava symbols used in Hindu devotional songs with orthodox Muslim beliefs.” In other words, the philosophy of ontological monism predisposed its followers to downplay all differences, variations and multiplicities—whether intellectual or social. Although ʿAlam does not discuss Padmāvat, the logic of his argument suggests that it was in such a climate of seamless social unity that Padmāvat was created, and of which it is a faithful reflection.

My disagreement with ʿAlam is not so much in his reading of the philosophy of Vahdat al-Vujūd, nor in his identification of Simnānī as its leading proponent in Avadh, but rather in the direct line he draws between

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an intellectual theological position and its expression in the world of social relations.

To illustrate just why it is problematic to trace a direct line of expression or influence from a theological position to social reality, and to show how adherence to the theology of vaḥdat al-vujūd did not necessarily result in a practice of ignoring social differences let us revisit Tārīkh-i Jāyas, and read it now for its author’s stance towards the surrounding Hindu culture. In the following passage ʿAbdul Qādir Jāyasī writes a history of the town of Jāyas, which is necessarily also a chronicle of the lineage of Saint Ashraf Simnānī, because it was the presence of this sacred lineage that in ʿAbdul Qādir’s estimation conferred upon the town its identity. At this point in his narrative ʿAbdul Qādir introduces yet another of the town’s illustrious citizens--Muḥammad Jāyasī--as a link in the chain of successions beginning with Ashraf Simnānī. What distinguishes this citizen, however, is not just his piety, nor yet his considerable literary genius, but his ability to better the local Brahmins at their own game:

The second among the students of Hazrat Sayyad Mubarak Bodle is Janāb Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī, who was totally immersed in the Ocean of Love of the One, as he was also well-acquainted with the nuances of Divine Law. His praise seeks no publicity, nor is his description contained in mere words--this leader of all those who search for Truth.

Fourteen volumes of his--containing the treasure of Love in the language of Hindi bhākhā, and filled with the marvels of both love and the Šūfi path--are still current and circulating. The contents (maẓmūn) of these volumes are the very essence (khulāsā) of The Meccan Revelations, Ḩusūs al-ḥīkam, Ihya ʿUlūm al-dīn, The Mašnavī of Maulānā Rūmī, Avārif al-maʿrif and, finally, Latāʿīf-i Ashrafi. Wherever there
are mystics and practitioners of the Šūfi way (ālim o āmil) the value of these volumes will be appreciated. Below I write a more detailed account of them:

Of all these, the book Padmāvat (nuskhah-yē Padmāvat) lists from beginning to end the nine kinds of Journeys, the seven kinds of Light, the letters of the Ashrafi family, and the noble conducts of the heavenly Chishtis. It seems to me, the fickle and erring writer of this account, that in Padmāvat the author has written a commentary (tafsīr) on the Nine Journeys and Seven Lights, mentioned in the Letters of Sayyad Ashraf Jahāngīr Simnānī (Maktūbat-i Ashrafi). It seems, furthermore, that in Padmāvat the author has analogized the hierarchic stations (maqāmāt) of Maktūbat with seven Islands and Nine Regions, or the seven Worlds and Nine Celestial Regions (sāt di̇p nau khand, ya‘nī haft duniyā, nah falak, nam guzāshah).

The second book is called Akharāvat and in it he has written a commentary on the Hindi alphabet. The reason for writing Akharāvat is this: Hazrat Malik Muḥammad often used to retire to the jungle of the Fort of Amēthī, and it is in that very forest that his holy tomb is now located. And the Raja of that place, whose name was Rām Singh, was a believer (mu‘taqid) in Hazrat Malik Muḥammad; in his dealings he showed Hazrat Muḥammad every social grace (tamāmī adab). Hazrat would go to see the Raja from time to time. By chance one day Hazrat Malik Muḥammad set out for the Raja’s home on the day of Jamāshṭamī of Shri Kishan or Khanhaiyyā, who is one of the most excellent elders of the religion of Hindus (az umdah-yē buzurgān-i mazhab-i hunūd ast). The king’s doorkeepers blocked his way, saying, “this is a forbidden time (vaqt-i mamnā‘at ast), especially for those who belong to Islam, and that Mahārāj is busy in the worship of the form of Shri Krishan, and Brāhmins are present, so at this time please be on your way.” He turned around and in an outrage while leaving he said to his road-blockers “Tell the Rājā that the exact time for offering prayers is passing and the Brāhmins know nothing of the science of determining the right time for prayers.” Commanding thus in a state of great indignation and anger he turned around and entered the jungle.

Upon realizing the way in which Malik Muḥammad returned, the Rājā was quite angry, and inquired from the Brahmins about the nature of the exact time for prayers. It all came out exactly according to the predictions of Malik Šāhāb
[ie. the Brahmins were indeed found to be wanting in the science of predicting the right time for prayers]. Without putting on as much as a cap or shoes, the king ran at once towards the jungle, and reaching that Honored One he fell on the feet of His Excellency and made a thousand excuses. After forgiving him his transgression Hazrat Malik said "The science of the Brāhmaṇs is within my heart, but they hide it from us because of their fanaticism (t’assub). Now, with God’s permission I will write out for you the contents of the books of the Brāhmaṇs in the Hindī language, and I will circulate these writings in such a way that they become the property of all, whether simple folk or noble. And thus it was that he wrote Akharāvat, and inserted within it all the subtleties and secrets of the Hindus (tamāmī nikāt o asrār i hunūd dar ān mundarij farmūdand). And he did it in such a way that the greatest pandits, and most skilled specialists who are present, and who understand its meaning, attest to the skill (liyāqat) of Malik Śāḥab and confess to his command of the Inner Sciences ('ulūm-i bāṭini).

The literary genealogy which ‘Abdul Qādir traces at the beginning of the passage turns on a pivot—the Lātāf-i Ashrafi of Ashraf Jahāngir Simnānī, the spiritual ‘father’ of all the Jāyas Šūfis. From this lofty pivot ‘Abdul Qādir casts his glance back into Šūfi history, and forward into his own time. Looking backwards, he traces the intellectual genealogy of Simnānī’s writings to the thought of Ibn al-‘Arabī and Rūmī and, looking forward, he traces the legacy of Simnānī’s writings in Jāyasī’s fourteen extant volumes which, he claims, are the very essence of these earlier Šūfi works. And when ‘Abdul Qādir moves from a general mention of Jāyasī’s fourteen volumes to discuss his specific works, he explains Padmāvat as a gloss on certain technical concepts introduced by Simnānī in his letters. Thus, Simnānī doesn’t merely inspire Padmāvat, he makes the text possible. Simnānī is the very reason for the existence of Padmāvat, just as he is the very reason for the existence of
Jāyas as a notable town. In this flow of inspiration, beginning with Ibn al-
‘Arabi’s Meccan Revelations, and continuing through Rūmī, Simnānī and
Jāyasī, ‘Abdul Qādir himself stands furthest downstream—the latest recipient
of an ancient tradition. ‘Abdul Qādir’s placement of himself in this particular
flow of succession lays bare his theological, emotional and intellectual
sympathies—he was a proud proponent of the tradition of Vahdat al-Vujūd.

And yet when it comes to ‘Abdul Qādir’s assessment of Muḥammad
Jāyasī’s motivations in writing Akharāvat we see clearly that he ascribes
the composition of this text to a tussle between Muḥammad Jāyasī, the Jāyas
Brahmins, and a local Rājpūt zamīndār, or land-owner. In mid-sixteenth
century Rājpūt landlords were the largest group of landed elite in Avadh.5
Larger, it seems, than the Afghans to whom belonged the then emperor Sher
Shāh Sūrī, and to whom Muḥammad Jāyasī offers a long encomium in the
prologue to Padmāvat. But though the Afghans ruled not just the region of
Avadh, but most of North India from their capital in Sāsārām (now in Bihar),
the reigns of local power were firmly in the hands of Rājpūts like Rām Singh,
whom ‘Abdul Qādir mentions as an admirer of Muḥammad Jāyasī. It was to
the home of such a local zamīndār that Jāyasī sought access. We can surmise
that Jāyasī sought this association with the neighboring Rājpūt zamīndār for
many of the same reasons as the Brahmins—being local the zamīndār was
infinitely more accessible than the distant Afghan Emperor, and it behooved

5See Muzaffar ‘Alam, Religion and Politics in Awadh Society, p. 330. Also Nurul
Hasan, “Zamindars under the Mughals” in Land Control and Social Structure in Indian
both the local Śūfis and the local Brahmins to be on good terms with him. But being on good terms with him required the careful cultivation of a profile. One had to be visible, and not merely present, at his court; otherwise one ran the risk of being forgotten—especially if, like Jāyasī, one was given to withdrawing to the jungle of Amethi to meditate and perform solitary Ḻikr. Nor was this a one way relationship—we see Rām Singh reciprocating by seeking out Jāyasī and showing him all possible civilities. ʿAbdul Qādir’s explanation for this is that Rām Singh was a believer (muʿtaqid) in Jāyasī. We can only guess at just what Rām Singh’s ‘belief’ consisted of; it may be that Rām Singh was a believer in Jāyasī’s poetry which, being written entirely in the local Hindi dialect, would have been accessible to Rām Singh; or it could be that the zamīndār was a believer in Jāyasī’s sanctity. ʿAbdul Qādir’s use of the word ‘muʿtaqid’ hints that Rām Singh’s belief in Jāyasī was not based simply on his aesthetic judgement of Jāyasī as a poet. At any rate, it was on the issue of access to the local landowner that we see an irruption of tensions between Jāyasī and the Brahmins when the Brahmins slyly use the pretext of the special occasion of Kṛṣhṇa’s birthday to deny him entrance to the zamīndār’s home. The denial was argued in terms of Jāyasī’s identity as a Muslim, and the account makes it clear that it was far from expected. ʿAbdul Qādir’s account leaves us with the impression that Jāyasī was a regular visitor to the Rājput zamīndār’s home where normally his presence as a Muslim was not deemed problematic.

Despite his alleged wujudi sympathies, Jāyasī did not take this denial lying down; he made a great show of taking offense and cast what was, in
effect, a curse—that the illustrious Brahmins will fail as astrologers, the most esoteric and technically complicated function a Brahmin is expected to perform for his patrons. It is entirely in keeping with the logic and authorial stance of ‘Abdul Qādir that the curse should come true and Jāyasī be proven more competent than Brahmins in their own field.

Of course, we may not read this vignette literally as a ‘true’ account of the series of specific events that sent Muḥammad Jāyasī scrambling to his desk, astrological almanacs in hand, to write the expose that has come down to us as Akharāvat. And we would do well to bear in mind the fact that this account was written in mid-eighteenth century, almost two centuries after Muḥammad Jāyasī’s death. It may fairly be said to reveal less the details of Jāyasī’s life than those of his biographer’s attitudes. But my point in presenting it in a discussion of what kind of a social world is implied by hybrid texts is to show how huge a difference there is between ‘Abdul Qādir’s reading of Jāyasī’s social world and ‘Alam’s or Shirreff’s reconstructions of that same world.

Whereas we are quick to assume that adherence to the theology of vahdat al-vujūd rendered meaningless all social and intellectual differences, or at least predisposed the believer to sail through such differences confident of their irrelevance, ‘Abdul Qādir dwells on them at great length in explaining the life of Muḥammad Jāyasī. In fact, one might go so far as to say that it is social tensions which structure his biography of Jāyasī. Far from rooting Akharāvat in the soil of high-minded pacifism, ‘Abdul Qādir roots it in the intense wrangling for recognition between the two local literati—
Brahmins and Sūfis. In this account it is not a generalized Hindu mass that appears as the opponent of the Muslims, but it is specifically the Sūfī and Brahmin literati vying with each other for the patronage of a Rājpūt landowner. And the Rājpūt, for his part, seems at pains to court both. In uncovering the range of elite Mughal responses to India and Hindus, we must notice that in explaining Muḥammad Jāyasī’s world ‘Abdul Qādir could simultaneously portray him as a believer in vahdat al-vujūd and a formidable participant in social tensions determined only partly by religious differences. In fact, for ‘Abdul Qādir it was this social tension that was the immediate cause of Jāyasī’s literary creativity—the spark that fired it.

With this ‘Abdul Qādir concludes his section on Muḥammad Jāyasī’s writings and turns his attention to Jāyasī’s strange death at the hands of a vengeful cow-owner. Let us follow Jāyasī to his tomb and see what else ‘Abdul Qādir has to say of Jāyasī’s responses to Hindus:

It is said that one day Hazrat Malik was absorbed in chanting the name of God loudly in the style of Zikr-i jahriyah within the jungle of the Fort of Amethi. This may have been in the style of the harsh-sounding saw-žikr (žikr-i arrah), when a hunter—thinking this to be the coughing of a tiger—fired his gun. From this gun-shot Hazrat Malik was martyred, and was buried at that very spot. Now the dargāh of Hazrat Malik is widely accepted and is quite famous—to the extent that in the vicinity of that radiant tomb all prayers are answered. People say that a few days before or after that incident a tiger had eaten someone’s cow and the owner of the cow had been bent on revenge and became the cause of Malik’s martyrdom. Among accomplished practitioners it is accepted that some žikrs have the effect of altering one’s appearance; this is mentioned in the biographies of some saints. Then is it so surprising that while doing the saw-žikr Hazrat Malik should have become like a tiger?
In the account of Jāyasī and the leper (chapter 2) we saw that ʿAbdul Qādir was concerned with food, and especially commensality, as a marker of social, as well as sacral, status. Here, in the account of the cow-eating tiger, we glimpse a similar concern and, I would argue, a bit more—for here eating is not simply a marker of status, it is also a weapon. Though in this curious vignette ʿAbdul Qādir is oblique about social tensions, he seems to be addressing a tension about dietary restrictions turning on the permissibility of beef. The tiger preys on the cow, which is forbidden to Hindus, and it is the Ṣūfī who gets the rap. We are sure at first that this is all a blunder, since Jāyasī’s solitary ẓikr happens to sound like the coughing of a tiger. But the last line of this vignette begins to persuade us of other possibilities by introducing an ominous note: certain kinds of ẓikr, ʿAbdul Qādir tells us, have the power to effect miraculous physical changes—the biographies of old Ṣūfīs tell us so. Is it, then, to be wondered that Jāyasī actually became a tiger while performing a ẓikr that sounded like a tiger? And this is where ʿAbdul Qādir leaves us, his question dangling in the air, urging us to fill in the social nuances left deftly unanswered. If Jāyasī became a tiger then is it to be wondered that he ate a cow? And if indeed he ate the cow then was the shooting just a mistake on the cow-owner’s part? Or was it, instead, calculated vengeance exacted from one believed to have committed the taboo of preying on a cow? Such doubts begin to erode any certitude we may feel about the hunter’s blunder as ʿAbdul Qādir plants his question in our minds.
The vignette accomplishes three rhetorical ends: first, it impresses upon us the sanctity of Jáyasī, the force of whose chanting transformed him into a tiger. Next, it horrifies the sympathetic reader that a saint so holy should be slain in the very act of performing źikr (and it is this which makes the slaying a ‘shahādat,’ or ‘martyrdom’). To appreciate the third rhetorical point made by this vignette we must recognize the ideal reader for whom ‘Abdul Qādir was writing--it was a reader whose sympathies he could count on despite the death of a cow. And given the sympathies of such a readership the last ideological point ‘Abdul Qādir makes is that of avenging a Muslim Saint against the cow-owner--for though shot ‘dead’, the martyred saint continues to work his miracles by faithfully answering prayers uttered at his luminous tomb. He is, even in death, unvanquished. In the logic of this narrative preying on cows is no impediment to sanctity. It is thus, I would argue, that ‘Abdul Qādir turns the act of eating into a rhetorical weapon against those who would not eat cows, that is, generally the Hindus, but perhaps more specifically, the Brahmans. As if the exposé of Akhravat were not enough of a slap in the Brahmans’ face, Jáyasī deals a parting blow with the violation of a supreme taboo. And the masterful touch in this is that the saint could not fully be held accountable, for he was temporarily a tiger--and tigers are wont to prey on cows.

This is more than just a curious tale of a bizarre blunder. It simmers with barely named tensions. Again, it may not be read literally as an account of Jáyasī’s death, but it can certainly be read as an account of a follower of vahdat al-vujūd towards his social world. And the picture we get is that his
vujūdī sympathies notwithstanding, ‘Abdul Qādir was quick to pounce upon the social tensions of his own world and project them back into the biography of a revered saint who was not just a follower of vaḥdat al-vujūd, but a key commentator of its metaphysical principles. If in the wake of ‘Alam and Shirreff we infer from hybrid texts a world laudably free of social tensions and intellectual differences, the inhabitants of that world felt under no compulsion to paint a similar portrait. Just as literary tropes are seldom faithful reflections of empirical reality, so also are theological positions unreliable guides in our quest for identifying the contours of Muḥgal social realities.

IV.3 Mughal Literature as a Hegemonic Gesture

If thematically hybrid texts like Padmāvat or Akharāvat do not necessarily imply a unitive inter-cultural response then what kind of a social world might they imply? And, furthermore, what kinds of ideological or rhetorical uses may they be put to? In his recent study of Madhumālatī Aditya Behl offers a suggestion that goes further than others in probing the sociology of hybrid texts. Like Padmāvat, Madhumālatī was also written by a sixteenth century Avadhi Şūfi--Shaikh Manjhan, who belonged to the Shattārī order. Again like Padmāvat, it was written in a local dialect of Hindi, and not in Persian--though as an elite Muslim Shaikh Manjhan must have moved at least at the periphery of the Persianate culture of pre-Muḥgal North India.
And, finally, like *Padmāvat*, *Madhumalati* is also a romance; in fact, it is one of the five canonical Hindi Śūfi texts that constitute the thematically hybrid genre of *Premākhyaṇa*.

Behl begins his discussion with a critique of the way “Avadhi *Premākhyaṇas* are studied as literary texts by classifying their generic features and summarizing their plots,” whereas “what is urgently needed is an analysis of how these literary forms are put together within the social and political arrangements and cultural practices of the 15th and 16th centuries.”

One social arrangement which Behl identifies as the backdrop to the thematic hybridity of the *Premākhyaṇa* is the pervasive Muslim political hegemony over an Indian, largely Hindu, cultural landscape. Behl claims that in this cultural scenario Śūfi *Premākhyaṇas* functioned as literary assertions of political hegemony, though not in the same direct way as Aziz Ahmad’s ‘epics of conquest,’ mentioned briefly in the introduction. These epics—like Amīr Khusro’s *Khazāin al-Futūh*—were clearly martial chronicles that followed a Muslim king on his victories through the Indian landscape; and as martial chronicles they made no bones about exulting in the humiliation of both Hindu and Muslim rivals by the monarch they sought to praise. Unlike *Premākhyaṇas*, the ‘epics of conquest’ were more or less bald assertions of power—often on the battlefield itself.

*Premākhyaṇas*, obviously, cannot be assimilated to this generic formula. But according to Behl they work rather more obliquely towards a

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similar rhetorical end. They function as idealizations, romanticizations and exoticizations of the Indian landscape. Thus, "It is vital to read Premākhyānas as texts in which Muslim ruling groups romanticize an Indian heroine within an Indian utopia constructed with Indian poetic conventions." And, Behl continues:

"Such narratives frame a literary enterprise in which the stories and poetic conventions of a conquered people are appropriated into a new Islamic political and artistic culture. Political sovereignty involved sponsoring literature and the arts, and many of the new Indo-Aryan languages were given impetus by the acts of patronage of Afghan and Mughal rulers."  

Premākhyānas, in other words, romanticize imperially--by unhesitantly claiming the prerogative of appropriating themes, scenarios, literary conventions, and even the languages, of the ruled. To the extent that Behl attempts to grapple with issues of power and tension as key players in the ecology of Mughal literary communities his appears to be a more psychologically acute reading of inter-cultural responses. But before we accept Behl’s model of Premākhyānas as hegemonic gestures, let us see how it flattens the range of esthetic responses and the texture of political relations in elite Mughal culture.

My reservations about the theory of hybrid texts as literary embodiments of hegemonic gestures begins with the recognition that rulers

7 Ibid. p. 12

8 Ibid. p. 8.
do not necessarily assume the prerogative of appropriating and assimilating the literary conventions, themes and languages of the ruled. A meticulous avoidance, disdain, and even fear of the expressive world of the ruled are all possible responses of a ruler confronted by an unfamiliar cultural landscape. Such, precisely, were the responses of generations of Persian-writing poets who immigrated to India in large numbers throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, only to survey the spread of Indian cultures coolly from their vantage point as court poets. As exalted employees at the Mughal court such poets might be expected to assume the hegemonic stance of appropriating Indic elements—whether for exoticized idealization, or scathing satire. Instead, these poets continued writing as though there were no change at all in their physical or intellectual surroundings. They lived, in other words, in that stubborn insularity which is also a prerogative of the sovereign.

This range of responses by rulers to their new-found power over a conquered landscape should not be unfamiliar to us, for it was repeated even more emphatically by the British in the very next century. Macaulay’s arrogant and defensive pronouncement of the entire Indian literary tradition amounting to less than one good shelf of European literature was certainly a hegemonic stance, but hardly one that set the stage for experimentation, hybridization, or the invention of macaronic genres by assimilating the cultures of the ruled. By contrast, the story of the Indian, and especially

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Bengali, experimentation with European genres in the nineteenth century is well known. Hegemonic stances may often be spectacularly insular, as rulers try to preserve the 'purity' of their identity against local 'contaminations'. I offer these few examples simply as a caution against assuming hastily that the thematic hybridity which distinguishes Premākhyānas and other Mughal texts is necessarily reflective of a hegemonic assimilation and exoticization of a subservient Hindu culture.

A greater hesitation about the model of hegemonic assimilation, however, is provoked by Behl's insufficient acknowledgment of the range of points-of-view which elite Muslim authors assumed in a culture where the centers of hegemonic power were not uniformly Muslim. If we explain hybrid texts as hegemonic gestures of assimilation then we also argue that the authors of such texts were somehow complicit in a Muslim hegemonic enterprise in India. One can argue—as Hindu nationalists have—that since the Mughal dynasty was formally Muslim, any Mughal Muslim participated in a hegemonic enterprise.

A subtler argument for Muslim hegemonic stances might invoke the force of Islamicization and its twin process, Persianization. Such an argument might draw our attention to the fact that from the twelfth century to the nineteenth Indian communities were increasingly receptive to Islamicate or Persianate cultural patterns whenever they came into contact with a Muslim ruling elite. The steady adoption of Islamicate dress and architecture in the Deccani kingdom of Vijayanagar, documented brilliantly by Philip Waggoner, is one example of a general drift towards the Islamicate that can
be demonstrated in place after place. The Rājpūt kingdoms in their long-lasting alliance with the Mughals, and even the warlike Marathas during their long struggle against the Mughals were all interested in Persianizing not just their visual arts, but also their public architecture and public speech. This eagerness to Islamicize and Persianize says much about the perceived status and prestige of the international Islamicate culture. And to the extent that Islamicization and Persianization were the dominant forces in the public culture of Mughal India a Muslim could be said to be complicit in a hegemonic enterprise simply by virtue of being a Muslim. But beyond asserting a general participation in the hegemonic force of Islamicization what else may we say about the specific stance taken by provincial authors like Jāyasī in their local literary communities? Does a Mughal author, and especially a provincial one, assume a hegemonic stance simply and unavoidably by being a Muslim? Behl's model would seem to imply so.

In our search for the relation between religious affiliation and authorial stance let us begin with a comparison of Jāyasī’s statement of his own position in the prologue of Padmāvat and ʿAbdul Qādir’s placement of Jāyasī in Tārikh-i Jāyas. Jāyasī begins Padmāvat with a eulogy to Sher Shāh Sūrī, the Afghan emperor in the Eastern part of the Gangetic plain in mid-sixteenth century.¹⁰ The eulogy does not identify Sher Shāh Sūrī as Jāyasī’s

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patron, but it is lengthy enough to reasonably allow the conjecture that Jāyasī’s masterpiece was conceived within the orbit of Sūrī presence, if not directly as a result of Sūrī patronage. But Jāyasī’s only pre-modern biographical sketch, Tārīkh-i Jāyas, offers a different picture altogether, for in it there is not even a shadow of Sher Shāh Sūrī—either as patron, or as an admirer. The Jāyasī of Tārīkh-i Jāyas is contained entirely by the village and the jungle. He is a thoroughly provincial creature.

What do we make of this discrepancy? Must we discount ‘Abdul Qādir’s placement of Jāyasī when faced with the authority of Jāyasī’s own self-statement? Or do the two accounts together illumine different, if parallel, facets of the experience and social position of a provincial Sūfī author in Muḥgal India? One way to read Tārīkh’s silence about Jāyasī’s association with the Sūrī court is by recognizing ‘Abdul Qādir’s own point of view in writing the history of the town of Jāyas. For him, as a member of the Ashrafi family, the town gained not just its sanctity, but its very identity, through a long association with the Ashrafi branch of Chishtīs. During ‘Abdul Qādir’s lifetime in mid-eighteenth century the Ashrafs were very much a thriving tradition. By contrast, at a remove of almost two centuries, the Sūrī king to whom Jāyasī appended a eulogy had ceased altogether to be a living and meaningful part of ‘Abdul Qādir’s experience. The Suris were succeeded by the Mughals during Jāyasī’s own life time and then, in the early eighteenth century the navabs of Lucknow replaced the Mughals as the dominant power in Avadh. Jāyas lay solidly within the kingdom of Avadh, and it was the navab of Lucknow who was the most relevant political figure in ‘Abdul
Qādir’s experience. But through this flux of political dynasties the Ashrafi family continued a stable and living presence. Thus, one can account for the absence of Sher Shāh Sūrī in Tārīkh-i Jāyas by recognizing the peculiar experiential and sectarian bias of its author. This reading, however, reduces Tārīkh-i Jāyas to an anachronistic misrepresentation of Jāyasī’s social world.

It is not, however, the only possible reading of ‘Abdul Qādir’s silence. One may also account for Sher Shāh Sūrī’s absence in Tārīkh-i Jāyas by recognizing that the microscopic lens which ‘Abdul Qādir focused on the town of Jāyas predictably blurred the imperial profile, even as it brought more proximate social relations into sharp focus. If we take ‘Abdul Qādir’s ‘ethnography’ of Jāyas as suggestive of the kinds of social arrangements experienced by provincial Sūfī authors, then what impresses us is that at the level of provincial experience a hegemonic center is rather difficult to pinpoint. In a bird’s eye view of North India—as offered, for example, by Abul Faẓl in his grand survey of Akbar’s administration, the Ain-i Akbarī–Jāyas lies smack in the middle of both the Sūrī and Muḥgal kingdoms. As such it seems to sit solidly within the orbit of the Perso-Islamicate culture of North India. But in the worm’s eye view that we are offered in ‘Abdul Qādir’s micro-history a new and more varied ecology reveals itself. In this view it was the local Rājpūt zamīndār, Rām Singh, that loomed the largest. It was to him that both Brahmins and Şūfīs flocked for recognition and arbitration in their quotidian wranglings; it was to his forest in Amethi that a Şūfī recluse retired to practice ṣīkr; it was he who employed the Brahmins as astrologers; and, again, it was he who is mentioned as the admirer of and believer in
Jāyasī. The ecology of local social relations that ʿAbdūl Qādir offers does not deny Jāyasī’s possible association with, or even patronage by, the Sūrī king. It does, however, complicate the picture of the social placement of a provincial Sūfī author vis-a-vis centers of hegemonic power.

When we allow for this ‘layering’ of centers of local and imperial power with their different religious affiliations, different degrees of Persianization, and the different ways in which each entered the lives of provincial subjects, then we begin to realize several points. First, that a provincial Sūfī author would need to be more acutely sensitive to his immediate audience of Rājpūt overlords than his courtly counterparts, for in his peculiar experience the hegemonic center was not exclusively the urban court with its Persianized taste and Islamicate cultural vocabulary. If as a member of a well known Chishti family Jāyasī participated in the world of Persianate learning that formed the backbone of the dominant Perso-Islamicate culture, then we must also remember that at other moments in his life he approached the Rājpūt landowner as a dependent. In the small world which Jāyasī inhabited the relatively un-Persianized culture of the ruling Rājpūt families was of at least as much consequence as the distant one of the Persianized Sūrī or Muḥā-bal courts. This may be one practical reason why Jāyasī, and other provincial Muḥā-bal authors like Afzal and Rāz-i Ilāhī, chose to compose in local dialects of Hindi, rather than the international Persian.

Faced with such a tangle of rulers and ruled, such a layering of proximate and distant centers of power, it is sensible to pause before attributing a hegemonic stance to an author simply because he is a Muslim.
IV.4 Şūfi and Sultān: Anti-Hegemonic Gestures

To assemble the profile of a provincial Şūfi exclusively through the evidence of a local history like Tārīkh-i Jāyas would also, however, be a mistake. Jāyasī may have responded to his immediate social surroundings by choosing, among other things, to write exclusively in the local dialect of Hindi, but we can be sure that as a member of a revered and famous lineage of Şūfi Saints his movements were not circumscribed by the town of Jāyas and the forest of Amethi. His access to the royal court may have been infrequent, but it could be smooth—for Chishtīs were frequent recipients of the largesse of Muslim royal families. Here the question which we have to ask is this: did association with or dependence on Muslim royal families necessarily mean that Chishtīs spoke in the same voice as the ruling Muslim elite? The answer appears to be that they did not—at least not inevitably.

One of the outcomes of the Şūfis’ association and dependence on royal patrons was a tense dialogue with those patrons—a dialogue in which the Şūfis sought to assert their difference from the power and ethics of the royal patrons. This, however, was a dialogue between Muslim royal patrons and Şūfi recipients, not between Muslim rulers and their conquered Hindu subjects. To the extent that such a dialogue drew upon the mythology, literary conventions and languages of the larger Indic culture, it did so in
hopes of offering a critique of hegemonic power. It was, thus, a dialogue which may more properly be described as an anti-imperial gesture.

It is precisely such a gesture that is preserved in one Mughal reading of the allegory of Padmāvat. Let us again visit our scribe, Muḥammad Shākir. Before he affixed his seal to the manuscript Muḥammad Shākir scribbled a preface on the flyleaf of Padmāvat. It is a sketchy vignette, but it is revealing. The preface begins with a heading which identifies it as the story of Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn Aulīyā (1236-1325), the great fourteenth-century Šūfī Saint of the Chishṭī order at Delhi, revered even today as one of the luminaries of Indian Sufism. The preface presents one incident in the Shaikh’s life:

“Sultān ‘Alāuddin Khaljī requested a meeting with the saint, and the saint answered by saying, ‘The house of this weak man has two doors, if the king enters through one door I will go out by the other.’”\(^\text{11}\)

Muḥammad Shākir even obliges us by mentioning his source. He copied these lines from Akhbār al-Akhyār, a famous compendium of the lives of Indian Šūfīs by ‘Abd al-Ḥaq Muhaddiš, the renowned scholar of hadīṣ in early-seventeenth century Delhi.\(^\text{12}\)

But the selection of an incident from the life of a Šūfī saint who figures nowhere in Padmāvat is a puzzle. All the more a puzzle for the tale is neither a hagiographic account of specific Šūfīs, nor a history of the Chishṭī order in

\(^{11}\) Muḥammad Shākir Amrohavī, Padmāvat, (Rampur Raza Library, ms.1), flyleaf.

India. Once, however, we probe the narrative structure of Padmāvat and its relation to medieval Ṣūfī conceptions of sainthood and monarchy, the insertion of this biographic incident in a martial-romantic narrative becomes clearer.

The tension between the emperor and the Ṣūfī Saint which Muḥammad Shākir captures in the little vignette from Shāikh Niẓām al-Dīn’s life is a frequently recurring point in many Ṣūfī hagiographies. As has been argued by both Simon Digby and Ḵẖāliq Aḥmad Niẓāmī, the trope emerges from an actual tension between kings and Ṣūfī saints settled within the boundaries of their kingdoms. Ṣūfī orders, like the Chishtīs, were organized into residential-devotional complexes, called dargāhs, scattered throughout the country. Each dargāh was presided over by a Shāikh like Niẓām al-Dīn Auliya; in addition to housing the saint, his disciples, and the tombs of his predecessors, a dargāh normally consisted of a mosque, and a hospice (langar) which dispensed food to the poor, and housed pilgrims on the move. In an organizational hierarchy mirroring the administrative divisions of the empire, the dargahs were responsible for geographic jurisdictions called vilāyats. The resident Shāikh was believed to be in charge of more than just the spiritual well-being of his vilāyat. Popular imagination held him responsible for the moral, political and material health of his vilāyat as well.

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He was even held to confer upon the king the power that the king needed to efficaciously maintain his political authority. Thus, political or natural disasters were commonly attributed to the moral negligence or excesses of either the populace or the king; they were divine visitations whose effects could at least be softened by the prayers or presence of an accomplished Shaikh. As such, a powerful Shaikh was one of the few sources of authority capable of challenging the monarch.

The map of medieval India can be pictured as a jigsaw of closely fitting vilâyats overlapping the parganahs and subahs—the administrative units of imperial bureaucracy. With their charismatic saints, the dargâhs often commanded much loyalty, and certainly inspired deeper affection among the people than did the imperial administration with its punitive functions. It was not just the common people who held the Shaikhs in esteem, but also the courtiers employed by the king. Amîr Khusro, who in his capacity as 'Alâuddin Khalji’s court poet eulogized his victories, is also famous as one of the most devoted followers of Nizám al-Dîn Auliyâ. And as a follower of the saint he was expected to appear in the saint’s court as well. It is thus a matter of little surprise that kings often perceived the more popular Sūfi Shaikhs as constituting at least a potential threat to their unchallenged authority, for the Shaikh’s ‘court’—his dargāh—formed a parallel system vying with the court for the undivided attention of courtiers and the population at large.

One royal response to this competition was to control the Sūfi Shaikhs by luring or forcing them into court appointments, thereby making them materially dependent upon royal patronage. The Sūfi response to this policy
was as varied as the personalities of the Shaikh\hs themselves, but a common response was the strict avoidance of the court, and especially the person of the king. This response—which seems to have been the preferred policy of at least the early Chishti Shaikhs like Nizām al-Din—resonated greatly in the literary imagination of hagiographers, for it was seen as a significant component of the ideal of voluntary poverty (faqr)—and faqr, in its turn, was held to be possible only through a removal from the world (tark-i dunyā). It is important to realize that faqr and tark-i dunyā were not just Ṣūfī precepts, but were the expected norms of behavior for a Shaikh—they were the visible ‘proofs’ of his sincerity, strength of character and proximity to God. Thus, through undue proximity to the court the Shaikh risked far more than friction with the often whimsical will of emperors already wary of a Shaikh’s power, and a growing economic dependence on a rival social apparatus; too close a proximity to the court tarnished a Shaikh’s image in the eyes of a community of followers who expected the ideal Shaikh to maintain a certain distance from the world which often weighed heavily on their shoulders, and from which they sought solace in the dargāh. Thus, the Ṣūfī avoidance of the court was not only a trope repeated by hagiographers eager to prove a revered Shaikh an ideal embodiment of faqr, it was also a recurring issue presenting itself to a Shaikh trying to negotiate a course between the expectations of his community and the suspicions of a monarch.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{15}\)This issue has been discussed at length in secondary literature on Indian Sufism. K. A. Nizāmī presents a lengthy discussion of this precise issue, but fails to point out that since the Sufi dargahs were also dependent upon royal patronage in order to meet the expenses of their daily activities, this motif articulates an ideal of independence which often needed to be modified. But whether it was an ideal or an actuality it continued to play an important role in
Whether motivated by the ideals of *faqr* and *tark-i duniya*, or shrewd calculations about independence and power, the Šūfi reluctance to be drawn into the royal orbit was interpreted by kings as a display of willfulness which had to be curbed and finally punished. Early Chishti saints like Niẓām al-Dīn Auliyā seem to have had a more or less consistent policy of stressing *tark-i duniya* as a distinguishing feature of their order; Chishti hagiographies, therefore, are rife with accounts of the imperial persecution of saints unwilling to be drawn into the royal orbit. It is the trope, and sometime reality, of the avoidance of the court by the Shaikh and its resultant tensions that appears crystallized in Muḥammad Shākir’s vignette from the life of Niẓām al-Dīn Auliyā.

But what was it about the tale he translated that reminded Muḥammad Shākir of this trope within Šūfi hagiographies? If we examine the tenor of conflictual relations in *Padmāvat* we see that it is not simply the conflict between the Rājpūts and the Muslim army of ‘Alāuddīn Khaljī that defines the social oppositions in the narrative. The conflict between Ratnasena and ‘Alāuddīn Khaljī constitutes the second of the two main sections of the tale, thus forming its dramatic conclusion, and is perhaps the more memorable for that reason; but it finds its symmetry in an earlier tension which interpreters like Aḥmad have chosen to ignore. The conflict in the first section of the tale

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the literary-hagiographical imagination of medieval Muslims; thus any scrutiny of the literary tradition must begin by taking this motif seriously rather than rejecting it as merely a rhetorical claim. For a modification of the stark opposition between the Shaikh and the emperor see Carl Ernst, *The Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics in a South Asian Sufi Center*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 59-61.
is between Ratnasena approaching Padmāvaṭī in the disguise of a yogī, and Gandharvasena, the king of Sinhala, and the father of Padmāvaṭī. Angered at the attentions of a common yogī to his daughter, the king arrests Ratnasena and tortures him in preparation for a public execution. What follows is a condensed version of perhaps the most famous martyrdom in Islamic history—that of the tenth-century ecstatic Šūfi Mansur al-Ḥallāj, martyred in Baghdad for making the highly controversial—and therefore unforgettable—statement of his unity with God.\(^\text{16}\) The presentation of Ratnasena as a second Ḥallāj is very direct: specific incidents in Ḥallāj’s martyrdom are homologized to Ratnasena’s symbolic martyrdom in Sinhala, and Ḥallāj is frequently mentioned by name.\(^\text{17}\) It is this martyrdom of Ratnasena as a second Ḥallāj that foreshadows his later ‘martyrdom’ at the hands of ‘Alāuddīn Khaljī.

But let us pause to examine the identities of the antagonists in both these conflicts. The victim in both cases is Ratnasena—a Rājpūṭ, a second Ḥallāj, and a paradigmatic lover who fights to his death rather than submit to Khaljī power. But Gandharvasena, the antagonist in the first of the two martyrdoms, is also quite unambiguously a Hindu. Thus, the prominent social conflicts in the tale cannot be placed solely under the rubric of Hindu-

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\(^\text{17}\) Jāyaśī draws constant parallels between the path of the lover-mystic, that Ratnasena is about to tread, and the path taken by Ḥallāj, see Jāyaśī, *Padmāvat*: 124.2; and when Ratnasena is about to be hung on a stake by Gandharvasena he ‘laughs as Ḥallāj had laughed, Jāyaśī, *Padmāvat*: 260.6.
Muslim tensions, rather, the tale articulates the conventional tension between the Şūfi—represented by the Ḥallāj-like Ratnasena, and the emperor, represented first by Gandharvasena, and then by ʿAlāuddīn Ḵaljī.

ʿAlāuddīn Ḵaljī is certainly important in his capacity as a persecuting monarch; however, his identity as a Muslim is tangential to the logic of the narrative; it is certainly tangential to Muḥammad Shākir’s reading of ʿAlāuddīn Ḵaljī. If Ḵaljī’s identity as a Muslim is important then it is so not in opposition to the vanquished Hindu masses but, rather, in opposition to the materially weak but morally invincible Şūfi shown in the original narrative as the figure of Ḥallāj, but imagined subsequently by Muḥammad Shākir as the figure of Niẓām al-Dīn Auliya. For in the persecution of Ratnasena Muḥammad Shākir hears the echo of another persecution—that of the Shaikh Niẓām al-Dīn by ʿAlāuddīn Ḵaljī. Thus the figure of Ratnasena, already enriched by analogy with Ḥallāj, is now taken a step further by Muḥammad Shākir’s recollection of Niẓām al-Dīn Auliya.

The ʿAlāuddīn Ḵaljī which resonated in the literary imagination of Muḥammad Shākir was not the Muslim warrior who destroyed the kingdoms of Warangal and Devgir in the first advance of Muslim armies into the Deccan in 1308. It was, instead, the less heroic ʿAlāuddīn Ḵaljī of such classic hagiographies as ʿAbd al- Ḥaq’s Akhbār al-Akhyār (1605), and Amīr Khwurd’s Siyar al-Auliya (1310-20) that Muḥammad Shākir remembered. And with this leap of his imagination Muḥammad Shākir located the tale in the terrain of medieval Şūfi—especially Chīshī—hagiographies. Read thus, the tale emerges as a comment on two competing axes of authority within the
medieval Muslim community, and as a Chishti remembrance—perhaps celebration—of the ethical stance taken by the founding saints of their order. In other words, the tale was read by Muḥammad Shākir within a specifically Chishti hagiographic and martyrrological framework, rather than as a Muslim posture of aggression towards Hindu polytheists, or the Hindu response to this aggression. Muḥammad Shākir's reading of the narrative is not apolitical, but it is rooted in a very different soil of political concerns than hegemonic gestures towards Hindus. It is a comment upon political relations within the Mughal Muslim community, a comment which skillfully uses the staunch Rājpūt as a metaphor for the staunch Chishti Shaikh.

That Muḥammad Shākir should hear the echo of figures and incidents in the hagiographic tradition should hardly come as a surprise to us, for he was himself a minor Ṣūfi Shaikh in the town of Amroha. In this capacity he would have had far more reason to read the classics of his tradition than such royal chronicles as Khazāin al-Futūḥ.

If we are quick to read in this tale a reflection of the tensions between Hindus and Muslims, then it is perhaps because in our experience the Partition and its violent aftermath looms as the most damning and defining feature of modern South Asia. It is the all-consuming roar of these events that persists in our imagination, and ultimately finds its response in the terrain of the royal epics of conquest. But as the voice of Muḥammad Shākir alerts us, there were other terrains within which its Mughal readers found the resonances necessary to converse meaningfully with Padmāvat and its
Persian retellings. For us it remains to still the clamour of our own concerns and let this whisper emerge from the margins.

IV. 5  *Burning and Melting*: Uses of an Indic Theme

In pursuing the varying relation between authorial stance, religious affiliation and thematic hybridity we seem to fetch up at a dead end when we focus on *Padmāvat* — for the only clues to Muḥammad Jāyasī’s social position are those contained in his eulogy to Sher Shāh Sūrī and his genealogy of the Ashrafi family. Other than these two self-statements in *Padmāvat* there is no other evidence which locates Jāyasī in his social world, thereby offering us clues as to his authorial stance. When it comes to Muḥammad Jāyasī, court chroniclers are silent and, for all their penchant for dwelling on provincial saints, Šūfī biographers are also tight-lipped — until, that is, ‘Abdul Qādir finally scribbles a handful of vignettes. In short, there is no way to verify from independent and contemporary sources the validity of Jāyasī’s self-statements about his association with the Sūrī court. If, however, we focus our attention on Jāyasī’s Muḥgal readers we reach anything but a dead-end. We see, for example, that one such reader construed Jāyasī’s allegory as a critique of the imperium, and in so doing placed him socially, religiously and literarily within a specific authorial stance.

And it is here that we also confront a hermeneutic curiosity. The fact that *Padmāvat* was prefaced by a lengthy eulogy to Sher Shāh Sūrī deterred
Muḥammad Shākir not a bit in arriving at his reading of its allegory as an anti-imperial gesture. We may explain this curious fact in two possible ways. First, we may say that Muḥammad Shākir chose the reader’s prerogative of making the text speak to his own concerns, and in so doing simply ignored those parts of the text which did not sit squarely with his concerns. Being a Ṣūfī he read Padmāvat with the peculiar concerns of a Ṣūfī—the eulogy notwithstanding. Or we may say that in the literary experience of Muḥammad Shākir it was entirely conceivable for a text written in the orbit of imperial influence to nevertheless assume a critical, anti-imperial stance. It is this possibility that I will now explore, for it suggests a wider range of rhetorical and ideological uses of thematically hybrid texts by Persianate poets writing unambiguously as servants of the Mughal court.

If we follow Behl’s logic then hybrid courtly literature should be the most favourable habitat for hegemonic stances—more favourable certainly than Padmāvat which as a Sufi text might well be expected to present a critique of the imperium. As we pursue the relation between thematic hybridity and court poets let us also see how the model of hegemonic stance may be further nuanced by the literary and thematic structure of a seventeenth-century Mughal mašnavī which displays many of the features Behl uses to construe Premākhyānas as hegemonic gestures of the Muslim ruling elite in Mughal India.
Soz o Gudāz, or Burning and Melting, was written in 1605 by the Jahangiri court poet Nau’ī Khabūshānī. If with Padmāvat we are unsure of the author’s relation to centers of royal power and patronage, then with Soz there is no such ambiguity. As a direct and well-known commission of Prince Dāniyāl—the son of Emperor Jahāngīr, and the grandson of Akbar—its imperial pedigree is about as impeccable as that of any Mughal text. Furthermore, as we will see, Dāniyāl didn’t merely commission the maśnavī from Nau’ī, but seems to have taken an active role in the selection of its thematic scenario—the determination of a Hindu widow to commit satī in spite of both Dāniyāl’s and Akbar’s dissuasions. In short, Soz is not demure about its provenance as a royal Mughal text, it flaunts those connections with a specificity that none of the Premākhyānas do. It is with confidence, then, that we can view Soz as a direct expression of how a royal patron liked to be profiled and remembered. It bears far more directly the imprint of an imperial gesture than the Premākhyānas. Furthermore, since as a tale of satī, Soz is about an Indian heroine, it enables us to examine whether and to what extent ‘Muslim ruling groups’ created a hegemonic literature by incorporating and romanticizing ‘an Indian heroine within an Indian utopia constructed with Indian poetic conventions.’

Unlike the Premākhyānas Soz uses few Indian poetic conventions, for Nau’ī wrote it unambiguously in the structure of a maśnavī with its rhyming

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couples. Nor is there anything macaronic about Nau'i's language, for Soz is written exclusively in Persian. However, in pursuing the question of thematic hybridity as a possible means of expressing a Muslim hegemonic stance this difference from the Premākhyaṃas should prove all the more useful—for if indeed Mughal royal patrons and poets struck hegemonic stances vis-a-vis a subservient Hindu culture then what better language to strike them in than Persian?

Nau'i begins Soz with a preface which names the inspiration that led to its composition. Early one morning the poet hears a knock which seems to come as much from outside as from within his own heart. It is at first a gentle rustling of the wind, and then as though a visitation from Angel Gabriel. The visitation leads the poet to the court of Prince Dāniyāl who complains of growing weary of the old themes of Persian lyrics and so requests a new style (tāzā guī):

Silence the old songs which haunt my mind
Pry these crusty barnacles off my heart.
How long—these songs of moths and nightingales?
How long may desire feed on gossamer dreams?
You are the nightingale of a fresh-dawned spring
Green, then, your tongue with some verdant style.
And with your beak pluck a new melody
That the same old rose be dissolved in clay
And the old thorns be crushed to granite dust.
For limp grows that tale of Shirin and Farhad.
stale--like leavings from a feast long done.
Lailā—she lingers on our lips but a whisper
And Majnūn fades, as a forlorn syllable.
Turn, for but a second, to the fire-temple
Note, at last, the idols and idol-chambers.\(^{19}\)

It is this princely exhortation that sends Nauﬁ to his desk to compose a mašnavī in which he introduces the reader to two Hindu children. They both bear unmistakable marks of love—from their very birth they are reared on the milk of Desire, and it is Loyalty herself that cradles them in her lap. As they grow up they labour together in school, but not like ordinary children—while others learn mere words, the two future lovers break their quills calligraphing the lessons of idol-worship. If in this respect at least they are Hindu, in others they resemble the famous Muslim Shakih Sanan, whom we have already met as Attar’s famous paragon of the determined lover who will stop at nothing, and so agrees to herd pigs in obedience to his Christian beloved. Like Shaikh Sanan our Hindu lovers also transform the very definition of belief (īmān) through the alchemy of pure, and obsessive, devotion.

The similarity with Shaikh Sanān emerges in the issue of conversion. By hearing pigs Shaikh Sanān effectively exiled himself from the Muslim community, and by embracing a Christian beloved he became as good as a Christian. The Hindu boy in Nauﬁ’s tale does not go through so decisive a conversion, but he does threaten to convert when at age ten his desire for his beloved increases into a craving for marriage (hamkhānagī). Knowing full well that his parents may have other marriage plans for him, he announces to his father that unless he is immediately married to his beloved he will become a sinner, violating both the temple and its idol:

\(^{19}\) Khabūshānī, Soz. p. 39.
I’ll set ablaze your Somnāth, and break its idols
I’ll shred the idol’s face fine as my heart
I’ll turn the idol homeless like a vagabond Darvesh
I’ll scorch the sacred thread like a candle-wick
I’ll seek my heart’s desire in the Muslim Ka‘bah
And with the martyr’s honey I’ll slake my thirst.\textsuperscript{20}

When we compare this ‘conversion’ with Muḥammad Afzal’s ‘conversion’ to Vaishñavism, we detect a pattern in the psychology of Persian lyric poetry--love wrenches all lovers from their conventional social moorings. In the logic of the lyric it is not just Muslim lovers, like Afzal or Sanan, who may become heretics and reprobates, but also the Hindu. For love drives all lovers relentlessly to the margins of social and ritual propriety. And, of course, the literary delight awaiting the reader in the Hindu boy’s threat of conversion is that as a Hindu he is already a kāfir, or disbeliever, from the perspective of a Muslim. It is, thus, a kāfir who becomes a kāfir to his own religion. Such are the deft ironies that titillate us into reading on.

But the Hindu boy never has to make good his threat, for faced with it his father relents, and promptly arranges his wedding. However, on the wedding day a cruel mishap cuts short the festivities as the groom proceeds to the bride’s house through the narrow city lanes. A wall, long decaying, finally topples and buries under it the groom and his entourage. The second the bride hears of this tragedy she decides to burn herself along with her fiancée’s crushed body. Thus it was, declares Nauī, that she became not his bride, but ‘the bride of embers.’ And here Nauī introduces a twist that is a

\textsuperscript{20} Khabūshānī, Soz, p. 45.
departure at least from our understanding of sati as a historical practice: the very Brahmans who normally supervise satis and stand to benefit from them try their best to dissuade the young bride from burning herself. They tempt her with a thousand promises, as do her relatives, but she holds fast to her resolve, saying “If Jesus himself hinders me I will not stop. I will not stop, I’ll curse his mother out.”

As news of the bride’s steely resolve spreads through the kingdom Emperor Akbar himself is astounded. Chagrined at such an outrage he chastises Love for having chosen so frail a victim for his trials:

O Love, what is your heart, but the heart of a kāfir?
Have Mercy, Enemy, don’t drag her through this mess
She, who’s but a wisp of basil-vine.
He, indeed, is a warrior who fights a man
But he who fights a woman—Shame on him.21

Love, however, cannot be shamed into giving up his duel with the bride. And so, the bride is summoned to Akbar’s court that he may himself reason with her, and quench her insatiable thirst for suicide with the waters of the heavenly fountain kauṣar. She has no choice but to appear in court; but she does so with a fiery defiance, fuming like an ember just fallen from the fire. And although the emperor adopts her as his daughter, although he grants her Lordship over India, and a thousand servants, a cavalry and even battalions of elephants, though he offers her immunity from the economic hardships

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21 Ḳabūshānī, Soz, p. 53
that deny widows the choice about whether or not to survive husbands, she is not swayed an inch from her resolve to burn on the pyre with her dead lover:

That woman of manly mien
That warbling bird
She had no desire except to give her life
her lips threaded a litany--and that was "Fire"
A single word she said--and that was "Burning." 22

Nau'ī, of course, delays her moment of burning for good dramatic effect. One such delay is occasioned by Prince Dāniyāl, the patron, who now appears to reason with her. She, however, leaps through this gauntlet of dissuasions like a "flame running to a pile of bone-dry kindling." Finally, as the helpless Mughal royal family watches they feel a new emotion--not the humiliation of defeat in the noble mission of preventing a social disaster, but a different humiliation altogether. The very shame that Akbar had tried to instill in love comes flooding in upon him and his grandson Dāniyāl as they compare their own flimsy resolve against that of the burning woman. Even the poet cowers by the burning pyre, ashamed of having thought only of the pain of burning, as would a mere woman:

Shame, shame upon your manliness, O Nau'ī
Shame upon your thin resolve, O Nau'ī.
Forever barred are you from life's wide circle
banished to death forever--since you crave life.
This praise of love and manliness--all lies
All lies these claims of donning the robes of men.
Teach me, God, the ways and customs of love
Kindle, God, my heart with a woman's spark.

22 Khabūshānī, Soz, p. 53
Grant my love the reslove to walk through fire
That it escapes the shame of 'manliness'.
spark this flimsy form of straw and dust
and drench my pinch of dust with the dew of fire.
Give me a single flower from Abraham's garden
And ensure that Fire leads me on my journey.  

To appreciate Soz o gudāz as a Persianate literary response to the Indic environment it is crucial first to gauge its distance from the Mughal legal response to satī. In the arena law the Mughal response to satī was largely negative, being rooted, ultimately, in the impermissibility of burning a human body according to Islamic religious law (shari‘ah). Further in this chapter I will discuss the Quranic associations with burning bodies which served as paradigms for both religious law and for the Mughal emotional attitudes to satī, but for now let us concentrate on specific legal responses to satī as attempted by Akbar and Jahāngīr, for these form the immediate backdrop of the Mughal social reality against which poets like Nau‘ī chose to present satī as a literary event.

We have two types of historical sources to help us uncover the Mughal legal response to the practice of satī: court chronicles by official historians like Abul Fażl or Badāyunī, and travelogues by European traders sojourning in the Mughal empire. Abul Fażl reports that Akbar himself interceded on behalf of Rājpūt widows to prevent their satī. For example, when in 1593 King Rāi Singh of Rīvā lost his son-in-law to a fall from a palanquin, and his daughter prepared to commit satī, Akbar met with Rāi Singh to persuade him

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23 Ḫabūshārū, Soz, p. 59.
to forbid the *sati*. In such a situation Akbar seems to use his position as both an overlord and a relative (for he had marriage relations with Rājpūt houses) to exert pressure upon them. Elsewhere, however, Akbar seems to have taken more direct legal action, such as when he instituted the specific police post of a *kotval* to ensure that unwilling women were not forced into *sati*. 

It is, however, in the accounts of European travellers to Mughal empire that we are treated to the most spontaneous accounts of *sati*. Coming mostly as traders or soldiers of fortune, Europeans were far from rare in Mughal India. Nor was *sati* a rare topic in their many travel accounts. In reading such travelogues one gets the firm impression that the spectacle of *sati* provided such a compelling narrative pivot that discussions of it became *de rigeur* for most Europeans. Indeed, for some travel writers vignettes of *sati* were occasions for self-promotion. The garrulous, but unfailingly entertaining, Niccolo Manucci, for example, uses a *sati* episode to present himself as the chivalrous knight when he dashes into a crowded *sati* ceremony with an Armenian companion, both of them brandishing swords, scattering the Brahmins, and emerging with a thankful widow in tow. 

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26 Niccolo Manucci. *Storia do Mogor.* vol. II. Trans by William Irvine. (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1989, reprint edition) p.90 The widow then goes on to wed the Armenian and lives happily with him in Surat while the Brahmins make a bee-line for the Mughal court where, however, the king sends them off with a flea in their ears by ordering “that in all the
accounts, however, were so lively. William Hawkins, who resided at Jahāngīr’s court, writes more soberly of the Emperor’s efforts to discourage satī in the immediate vicinity of Agra:

The custom of the Indians is to burn their dead, as you have read in other authors, and at their burning many of their wives will burn with them, because they will be registered in their books for famous and most modest and loving wives, who, leaving all worldly affaires, content themselves to live no longer than their husbands. I have seene many proper women brought before the King, whom (by his commandment) none may burne without his leave and sight of them; I mean those of Agra. When any of these cometh, hee doth preswade them with many promises of gifts and living if they will, but in my time no perswasion could prevaile, but burne they would. The King, seeing that all would not serve, giveth his leave for her to be carried to the fire, where she burneth herself alive with her dead husband.  

Nicholas Withington, who also spent four years in Mughal India as a trader, reports a similar royal attempt at curbing satī through legal means, when upon landing at Surat—the principal Mughal port—he witnessed the satī of a ten year old soldier’s widow. The soldier had died in action after his betrothal to the girl, and although his body was cremated on the battle-field, his turban was returned to his family in Surat. Upon receiving the turban the family decided to have a cremation, with the turban serving as a symbolic proxy for the dead son. The child-widow, who was yet a virgin, was to join

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the turban on the pyre. I find it a mark of Withington’s powers of observation that he should not only notice the seemingly inconsequential detail of the turban but dwell on it, for in Rājpūt culture the turban is the symbolic distillation of a man’s valour and honor. The ritual of being cremated with it would, therefore, have been highly meaningful to the relatives and the widow, but almost certainly lost on less observant foreigners.

Just as the satī was about to be arranged, however, an order arrived from the local Mughal governor commanding that the satī may not proceed, for the marriage had not yet been consummated and the girl was a virgin. In Withington’s report the girl took the news “wonderfull passionately, desiringe them to sett fyer on the wood presentlye, saying her husband was a great way before her.”28 It is at this juncture that we get a glimpse into the workings of the Mughal legal apparatus: faced with the governor’s order the girl’s relatives dared not proceed with the satī, but nor did they let the matter lie. They mounted, instead, a visit to the governor, and “intreated him, givinge him a presente for the same; which when they obteyned, they returned and (with greate joy to her, as she seemed) burnte her to ashes with her husband’s clothes, and then caste the ashes into the river.”29 And finally, Withington permits himself an emotion— but one expressed vicariously through his agent, who was “soe greeved and amazed at the undaunted

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29 Ibid. p. 220.
resolution of the younge woman that hee said hee would never see more burnte in that fashion while hee lived."\textsuperscript{30}

Here we see not only the provincial bureaucratic mechanism by which Jahāngīr sought to curb sāti, but also how that mechanism was subverted and circumvented by unwilling Rājpūts. The reach of the Muḥāl legal-system was long enough that at least in a major urban center like Sūrat a sāti could not happen without the knowledge of the local governor, who stood to gain economically by first enforcing the law, and then bending it for a bribe. Such were the holes in the system, and one must wonder if it was because he saw them plainly that Jahāngīr only exerted himself to discourage local satis happening around the capital at Agra. The overall picture we assemble from Hawkins' and Withington's accounts is of a Muḥāl imperial failure at checking a socially entrenched Indic practice.\textsuperscript{31}

Let us return to Soz o gudāz and see just how Nauṭī uses the raw material of this social reality to present sāti as a literary event. Juxtaposing Soz against the accounts of Withington and Hawkins allows us to see that for all its embellishments Nauṭī's tale was a fairly direct representation of Muḥāl imperial efforts at thwarting and discouraging sāti. For example, Hawkins' account of Jahāngīr intervening by offering economic incentives is

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid. p. 220.

\textsuperscript{31}The secondary literature on sāti is, of course, considerable; however, scarcely anyone has attempted an analysis of the social meanings of sāti in pre-modern India. An exception, and a very stimulating and eloquent one, is by Ashish Nandy, “Sati in Kali Yuga: The Public Debate on Rup Kanwar’s Death,” in The Savage Freud and Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 45-46.
not merely reminiscent of Nau̇rī’s tale, it is an exact parallel of it. Like Akbar and Dāniyāl in Nau̇rī’s tale, Jahāngīr also fails in his dissuasions. Thus, far from being a celebration of imperial authority over a subservient Hindu populace Nau̇rī’s poem shows the *limits* of the king’s authority, which is seen not to extend to the domain of ideal love. Through his commission to Nau̇rī the Mughal royal patron comes to terms with the limits of his authority (as well as the authority of Islamic law) by recognizing an arena of personal conscience and social conventions lying beyond the grasp of legislation and dissuasion.

The subtle steps by which both patron and poet come to terms with this failure is a study in how a literary sensibility moulds the raw material of social reality for both aesthetic and didactic uses. If in the Mughal social world *sati* as a legal event represented a failure of the Mughal patron, then *sati* as a literary event represented a lesson in the ideals of love. What is important to realize, however, is that Nau̇rī presents this as a lesson well learnt by all the onlookers—the emperor, the prince and himself. To the extent that the patrons and the poet prove themselves receptive to this lesson they are *not* failures in the arena of ethics. To the extent that the burning woman can shame Nau̇rī, and presumably Prince Dāniyāl, into reflecting upon their manliness (*javānmardī*), they prove themselves thoughtful and sensitive. It is thus that the Mughal literary imagination transformed legal defeat into moral triumph.

In the logic of Nau̇rī’s *mašnavī*, however, this was a not a triumph over a subservient Hindu culture. It was, instead, a triumph over the many
weaknesses to which all, but especially the powerful, are prey. The weakness, for example, of being so terrified of pain that we not only cringe at the thought of sacrificing ourselves for our beloved, but also seek to prevent others from carrying out their resolve. It is this weakness of valuing consciousness and comfort above all that bars us, according to Nau’dî, from “Life’s wide circle”, banishing us forever “to death since we crave life”.

Such, I would argue, is the mirror that Nau’dî holds up to the reader as well as his patron. And like every mirror this one also presents images in reverse: the two Hindu lovers are like Shaikh Sanan, who is himself the reverse of a proper Muslim Shaikh since he takes charge of the swine. When the Hindu lover comes of age he threatens another reversal—conversion to Islam and seeking solace in Ka’ba; the fire yields a cool dew; the woman has a ‘manly mien’, and men are ashamed of their effeminacy. The grandest reversal of all, however, is saved for the very last couplet when, alluding to an episode from the Quran, Nau’dî compares the woman’s blazing pyre to the garden of Abraham. In the Quran Abraham was thrown into a blazing fire by a mob of furious idolaters for having smashed their idols to bits. Instead of burning, however, the fire miraculously turned into a cool rose garden.\(^{32}\) It is that Abrahamic garden which Nau’dî sees blooming around the blazing woman, and from which he begs a single flower—that true ardor may forever guide his way through life. Thus, in the sharpest reversal of all, a Hindu

woman absorbed in a most 'idolatrous' obsession with her beloved becomes transformed into a Prophet who led a life-long crusade against idols.

If we wonder why a Mughal royal patron might want to commission a poem which represents his moral subservience to a Hindu woman, then one answer is that an ironic reversal of social roles is a consistent strategy by which Nau'ī seeks to delight the reader. If in Soz the lessons of both manly loyalty (javānmardī) and faith (īmān) come from the least likely source—a Hindu woman—then this is entirely in consonance with an aesthetic of reversals which not only Nau'ī, but also other Mughal poets, employed consistently. Indeed, to fully understand the literary resonance of these reversals one has to trace their path beyond just Mughal literature and into the canon of Persian classical poetry.

The clearest example of this esthetic of reversals is in the famous episode of King Maḥmūd of Ghaznā and his Hindu slave Ayāz recounted, among others, by Ṭīṭār in his Conference of the Birds (Maṣṭiq al-Ṭair). After kidnapping Ayāz and bringing him to Ghazna Maḥmūd falls in love with him and becomes, instead, his slave. Thus king and slave trade places. Elsewhere in The Conference Mahmud is humbled by others, including a Şūfi who, in an episode reminiscent of Niẓām al-Dīn Auliya, calls him a thankless

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33 Rāzī’s Sham’ o Parvānah is another example of the use of this literary strategy as we will see in the very next section.

infidel while throwing him out of the hospice. Thus, in presenting the humbling of king, prince and poet Soz may simply be said to place the royal patron within a recognizable niche which was certainly humble, but also hallowed by tradition. We may say that Nau'i reworks the literary trope of kingly humility in the face of love. But to simply stop at that would be to rob Nau'i of the credit that is due him as an innovator. What is new about Nau'i's reworking of the trope is that it is neither the darvash nor yet the Hindu slave that occasions the lesson in humility. It is now a Hindu woman—and this was an innovation in the tradition of Persian poetry.

This, however, is an answer that can only be given if we approach Soz as a literary work, and not merely as political propaganda. Approaching Soz as a literary work means allowing its patron the sensitivity to enjoy the suspension, even reversal, of a conventional social hierarchy. It means coming to terms with the aesthetic logic and psychology of a text which works because of its ability to present surprising reversals to an audience consisting precisely of those powerful elites who in their actual lives may seldom have experienced such reversals.

The big weakness, I believe, in approaches which explain the Persianate use of Indic themes as hegemonic imperial gestures is their insufficient attention to literary issues, and an insensitivity to the many ways in which literary texts please their audiences. To argue commonsensically that royal commissions like Soz serve as bald assertions of power over a

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subservient Hindu mass is to reduce Mughal royal literature to nothing more than a political tract. The alternative is to allow for the possibility that as literarily sensitive readers Mughal patrons presented their selves to the world in a variety of roles determined by aesthetic--and not just political--considerations.
CHAPTER FIVE

"NONE MAD AS A HINDU WOMAN":
THEOLOGICAL USES OF SATI

Cūn zan-i Hindū kāsī dar ‘āshiqī divānah rūst
Sokhtan dar Sham‘ kushtah kār-i har parvānah rūst
In love there is none as mad as a Hindu woman
For where’s the moth that burns within a cold flame?
Amīr Khusro of Delhi

V.1 ‘Āqil Khān Rāzī: The Mystic Bureaucrat

Nauṣī’s Soz o gudāz represents just one instance of a literary use of an Indic theme in a Persian text. In it the Mughal royal patron comes to terms with the limits of his authority over an Indic moral and conventional sphere. This does not, of course, exhaust the range of uses to which Indic themes—even specifically satī—were put by Mughal poets responding to different literary contexts and constraints. To represent this entire range would be a gargantuan task, for every use of a theme like satī would illumine yet another facet of the Persianate response to the Indic environment. In the last chapter I

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discussed uses and interpretations of Indic themes which might broadly be grouped under the rubric ‘political’ or ‘social.’ Thus, *Tārīkh-i Jāyas* was seen to articulate the rivalries between local Brahmans and Ṣūfīs, as well as alliances between local Rājpūt rulers and their dependent Ṣūfī subjects. Similarly, Muhammad Shākir’s interpretation was seen to deflect the allegory away from a concern with Hindu-Muslim issues and towards the internal politics of Ṣūfī-imperial relations. Finally, in *Soz* we saw that the Indic scenario of a *sati* was used by the author to rework the well-known trope of the king humbled by a force larger than royal power.

I will now address a slightly different set of issues and examine the theological uses of *sati* by Mughal poets, for at the root of the Persianate responses to *sati* was the Islamic injunction against violating the integrity of the human body by burning it. Thus, whether sympathetic or inimical, sophisticated or clumsy, Mughal literary representations of *sati* inevitably came up against the breach between the two theologies. The disagreement between the two theologies was so vast, it would seem, that a Muslim theologian could only respond to *sati* by dismissing it as an abomination. And such indeed was the response of Muslim theologians like Ibn Battūta who encountered *satis* on their travels through India. But again, it is the unexpectedly sympathetic representations of *sati* by theologians, and theologically inclined Ṣūfīs, that tell us something new about the range and flexibility of Mughal Persianate responses to the strangeness of an Indic environment. In order to examine these responses I will look mainly at 'Āqil
Khān Rāzī’s Perso-Hindi retelling of the Padmāvatī narrative, called Sham’ o Parvānah.

Sham’ is not merely a translation of Jāyasī’s Hindi Padmāvat; instead, Rāzī retells the story of the Hindi text with enough embellishments that his retelling might be called a ‘transcreation’. About the author of this macaronic transcreation we know far more than we do about either Muḥammad Shākir or Muḥammad Jāyasī. Mīr ‘Askari ‘Aqil Khān Rāzī Khvāfī was a man of multiple and sometimes discrete identities. As a courtier in the employ of Emperor Aurangzeb he was known by his given title ‘Aqil Khān, which translates literally, if crudely, as ‘intelligent.’ ‘Aqil Khān’s association with Prince ‘Alamgīr went back to the years before he emerged as Emperor Aurangzeb. During Prince ‘Alamgīr’s early years as the governor of Deccan ‘Aqil Khān accompanied him as a general (bakhshi-ye duvvum), and it was only upon ‘Alamgīr’s accession to the throne that Rāzī received the honorary title of ‘Aqil Khān.1

After the bloody intrigues of 1658, which paved Aurangzeb’s way to the throne and Dārā Shikoh’s to the gallows, ‘Aqil Khān was first appointed the superintendent of the royal baths (daroghā-ye ghusl). It was finally in 1682 that ‘Aqil Khān reached the acme of his bureaucratic career when he was promoted to the governorship (sūbahdāri) of the Red Fort—a position he held

with such magisterial presence that several biographers remember him as headstrong and self-willed. Indeed, there was cause to be headstrong, for Aurangzeb spent the last two decades of his life entirely in the Deccan dealing with the Marāthā uprisings. Superintendence of the Red Fort meant, therefore, that 'Aqīl Ḵān had his fingers on the very nerve center of the Muḥgal empire.

It is curious, therefore, that 'Aqīl Ḵān is remembered today in a very different role and with a very different name. To the extent that we remember him at all today it is as a poet with the pen name of 'Rāzī. But even in the arena of poetry we know him less for his own work than for his association with another Muḥgal poet, 'Abdūl Qādir Bedil. As a man of means and one of the leading nobles of Delhi, Rāzī seems to have taken a number of young aspiring poets under his wing. One of these was the young Bedil who, right after his move to Delhi in 1667, sought out Rāzī for advice and guidance on stylistic matters. In the next two years Bedil dedicated two metaphysical mašnavīs to Rāzī.² In the years that followed Bedil would often send his poems to Rāzī for corrections, and in 1696, when Rāzī finally died, Bedil lamented his loss in an ode: "Mahdī-ye jamjāh 'Aqīl Ḵān namānd"-- "That royal guide of ours, 'Aqīl Ḵān, is no more."³ It is his literary association with Bedil, arguably the greatest of all Indo-Persian poets, that has won for Rāzī a footnote or two in the corpus of contemporary Urdu scholarship on the


³'Abdūl Ghānī, Life and Works of 'Abdūl Qādir Bidil, p. 80.
Mughals. It is my privilege to introduce him for the first time to an English readership.

If we approach Rāzī’s Shamʿ with all the expectations that we bring to the canon of Persian classic poetry we find him wanting. If we approach him with the expectations we bring to Mughal courtly poetry we will find him either surprisingly simple, or disappointingly simplistic in style. His is a far cry from that complex and intricate style that either delights or aggravates, and is usually dammingly called sabk-i hindi. But even when we compare Shamʿ to Jāyasī’s Hindi Padmāvat, Rāzī does not fare well. Jāyasī’s Hindi poem unfolds with a leisure that is, quite simply, grand. The author dwells lovingly on the smallest of details till we learn to expect a slow and baroque progression. By comparison Rāzī’s retelling is hurried in its abbreviation. One gets the sense of being bounded by time, and under pressure to move through all the relevant twists of the story.

If, however, we approach Rāzī with a question about the range of Perisanate theological responses to Indic themes, he serves us marvellously, for he was especially remembered by his contemporaries as being not only mystically inclined, but also very erudite. The biographers Bindrāban Dās Khusgo and Navāz Khān both remember Rāzī for this layer of his complex personality: they make a point of mentioning his erudition in Ṣūfī doctrine, especially his command of the subtler points of Rūmī’s difficult mystical

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poem *Mašnavī-ye Ma'navī*. As we have already seen, Rāzī was associated with the Shāftārī Saint Būrḥānuddīn Rāz-ī Ilāhī, who was himself active in composing macaronic Hindi-Persian verse. Besides a short mystical poem called the *Muraqqaʿ*, which he patterned on Rūmī’s *Mašnavī*, Rāzī also composed a biography (*Samarāt al-Ḥayāt*) of his Ṣūfī master, in which he interestingly points out an occasion when Aurangzeb expressed a wish to visit Shaikh Būrḥānuddīn but received the same rebuff that ʿAlāuddīn had received three centuries earlier from Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn Auliya.

**V.2 Shamʿ o Parvānah: Safi Eulogized**

In 1658 Rāzī wrote a much-embellished version of the Padmāvatī-narrative in Persian. In its narrative outlines it is roughly similar to Jayasī’s *Padmāvat*, though Rāzī never mentions Jayasī as a source for his composition. Let us begin with its title. Rāzī chose to call his Persian composition *Shamʿ o Parvānah—Flame and Moth*, and by so naming it he emplotted it within the grid of conventions and expectations that form the terrain of the Persian lyric-

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-the ghazal. Readers alert to the conventions of the lyric will recognize that
the two words sum up a familiar scenario within the ghazal, where the moth
conventionally appears as the enthralled lover circling its beloved, the flame.
The dance of love, however, is doomed, for by dawn the flame inevitably
scorches the moth, reducing it to a smear of ash. In the conventions of the
ghazal the moth is the paradigmatic lover, for not only does it pursue an
impossible love, but it also bears the pain of burning without uttering a
complaint. In its silent suffering the moth reveals the proof of its sincerity as a
lover. The pain of burning (soz) thus becomes a positive value—the index of
the lover’s resolve. It is this complex cluster of values, with their dramatic
and conventionalized scenarios, that Rāzī compresses in the title Shamʿ o
Parvānah. But in addition to summing up the terrain of the ghazal Rāzī also
encapsulates the tale of Princess Padmāvatī, for, as we have seen, the tale
culminates with the self immolation of the widowed Princess. By thus
emplotting his translation as a ghazal and simultaneously encapsulating the
Padmāvatī-narrative Rāzī nudges the reader’s expectations within a very
specific groove of conventions. The horizon which contains our movements
as sensitive readers has already been defined before we begin to read a word
of the narrative.

Before proceeding in this groove, however, it is useful to establish
some literary categories, and the language in which they are presented by

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8 For another work by the same name see Ahlī Shirāzī, Mašnavī-ye Shamʿ-Parvānah,
edited by Ḥamīd Rabbānī (Tehran: Kitab-Khanah-ye Sanai, 1965). It is not at all clear,
however, that Rāzī has chosen this earlier work (1422) as a prototype for his Shamʿ.
Indo-Persian authors like Rāzī. The Persianized intellectual community of medieval India distinguished two very rudimentary levels of literary as well as theological interpretation: the majāzī and the haqīqī. The majāzī was the metaphorical as well as the literal level, while the haqīqī (from haq, meaning 'truth') was the 'essential' level serving as the referent for the metaphor. As readers of the ghazal know, these two levels constitute the basic binary distinctions drawn by both poets and Sūfis. The distinction between majāz and haqīqat was a significant distinction governing poetry, and corresponding to a theological distinction which postulated every created thing as also possessing a hidden (bātin) and a manifest (zāhir) aspect. The literary-metaphysical homology may be expressed thus:

*Majāz* (Metaphor)=*Zāhir* (Manifest)

*Haqīqat* (Essence)=*Bātin* (Veiled)

What emerges is a rhetorical structure emphasizing twin-pairs of either complementary or contradictory terms. Each half of such a binary cluster defines the limits of its twin so that together the two define a totality. In Sufi theological discourse such binary clusters were set up to ease the explication of conceptually slippery points, but they simultaneously served the aesthetic purpose of starkly juxtaposing two unlikely categories so as to jolt the reader's expectations. This aesthetic appreciation is often deepened by either the alliteration or the rhyming of the two terms. An example of one

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such homophonic cluster is *jalāl* and *jamāl*, terms defining two complementary attributes of God—Power and Beauty. Bruce Lawrence explains this rhetorical strategy by grounding it in the theological postulation of all reality as dichotomous and:

"requiring the play between several dyads in search for a point of resolution at once personal and transcendent. Numerous are the theoretical treatises going back to the foundational period of Sufism that enumerate powerful antipodes. Some are visual (outer/inner), others temporal (first/last), still others spatial (this world/the next) or dispositional (drunkenness/sobriety). The very construction of these topoi was propaedeutic, to invite the listener/reader to move beyond the surface to deeper notions of truth, beauty and love. Their relationship to each other was deliberately unsteady, ever changing, endlessly challenging."  

Let us read *Sham‘ o Parvānah* with the above points in mind. We see that Rāzī constructs his poetic persona entirely in conformity with the paradigm of the suffering lover. The kind of suffering Rāzī chooses to highlight is significant—it is specifically the pain of burning, or *soz*, that he cultivates. Like the moth Rāzī also courts fire:

I turn my tears into blood  
from within I draw a fiery cry  
from this longing heart I draw a sigh  
in my heart I raise a pen of fire  
I nurse the embers there, and sift the sparks

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My tongue's the very nib of this fiery pen
It writes the words with sparks and embers.\(^{11}\)

The imprint of this inner fire is the form of the manuscript of Shama'. For example, Rāzī says that the maddās—the diacritic markers indicating the long vowel ā, normally shown in the Arabic script with a long wavy line—are the long sighs—the 'aahs'—which proceed from within himself. Similarly, the nuqtahs (dots) are the sparks which shoot out of his heart.\(^{12}\) Thus, the physical form of the manuscript of Sham' is not merely homologized to burning (soz)—it is quite literally the scar of a burn. We can, then, talk meaningfully of an 'iconography' of the manuscript. It is both anthropomorphic and igneous.

As poet and translator, Rāzī is both physically and morally involved in the creation of Sham'. It is not enough for him to be engaged intellectually, as might a conventional translator or narrator. His act of translation demands more than a skilled transposition from Hindi to Persian. It demands the translation of the translator into the persona of the lover—a complete participation in the mystical and ethical experience of the lover who is the subject of the tale. In other words, the translator can translate only by becoming the subject—by participating in the soz that is the destiny of the lover as the moth.

But if the act of translating and narrating is an ethical and participatory act, then reading is no less so. Rāzī claims quite unequivocally that reading is

\(^{11}\) *Sham' o Parvānah*, f.3.

also an act of transformative participation. It is only the reader who (like the poet and the moth) nurtures fire within his heart that will be able to recognize love (‘ishq) as the essential point of this work. In other words, it is only when the translator and the reader bring to the tale the same capacity for burning passion (soz) as the moth that the tale reveals its essence. But something more is demanded of the reader:

O voyeur in the house of metaphors  
O you who step so light on a lover’s needy path  
draw the mascara of love upon the heart’s eye  
and then step earnestly within this house  
You’ll see within this house of marvels the Soul  
and the essence of life enveiled by the body.\(^{13}\)

In this passage Rāzi sets up a number of binary oppositions which fall within the categories of the internal (bātin) and the external (zāhir), or the desirable and the undesirable. The reader who is merely a voyeur (naẓar-bāz) sees only with his physical eyes and steps lightly on the road of need--the road taken by all lovers craving the attentions of the beloved, and therefore 'needy'. The voyeuristic reader is cautioned, instead, to grasp the matter with the 'eyes' of his heart after he has strengthened them with the mascara of love (‘ishq). Thus, it is through eyes honed by love that one should read the tale; the organ of perception should be the heart, and not just the eyes, for they can only reveal an external reality--the house of metaphors. The acts of writing, narrating, translating and reading converge, therefore, in that cluster of

\(^{13}\)Ibid., f. 5.
ethical and mystical values which are embodied by the perfect lover. What Rāzī recommends is not a simple aesthetic enjoyment of the tale but an active engagement of its ethical demands.

The technical term Rāzī uses for 'metaphor' is majāz, which immediately invokes its twin term, haqīqat, (essence). Thus, the field of binary opposites set up by Rāzī includes on the one hand such externals like vision and metaphor, and on the other such inner and desirable things as the heart. As the locus of sincerity and love it is the heart which grasps the referent of the metaphors.

Rāzī proceeds next to describe the vision veiled in the house of metaphors. The secret which the reader may glimpse is that of the manifestation (jālvaḥgārī) of Divine Beauty (ḥusn).\textsuperscript{14} Beauty, according to Rāzī, delimits itself in the specifics of the created world. Above all, however, it manifests itself in the beloved who shares a small measure of divine beauty--just as a metaphor shares some qualities of its referent. The viewer sees, therefore, the signs of this manifestation in an array of beloveds. It is at this turn in the poem Rāzī introduces another, and somewhat unexpected, set of binary terms--the Hindu and the Turk.\textsuperscript{15}

This pair is by no means unprecedented in the ghazal where the Hindu conventionally stood for both a slave and a dark person, while the paler-complexioned Turks, feared for their ferocity, suggested an imperious ruler, a

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., f. 1.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., f. 1.
fair person, and, thus, by extension the beloved--who was both imperious and fair.\textsuperscript{16} Rāzī intends the reader to relish all of these physical and conceptual contrasts but he introduces the pair to trigger a chain of associations which continues the list of binary opposites. First, the polarity of Hindu and Turk, dark and fair, implies a geographic polarity--the eastern extremity of Islāmdom represented by India, and its western reach in Turkey and Arabia. The next step in this series of binary associations is the pair of famous lovers and beloveds associated with each region. Rāzī first mentions such celebrated lovers as Lailā and Majnūn--the manifestations of Beauty in Arabia, and the paradigmatic lovers for Arabians. But in India, he continues, manifestation (\textit{zuhūr}) assumed the form of a glowing ember (\textit{sho'lah}), and caused the lover to burn physically in the presence of the beloved. The example Rāzī gives of such actual, physical burning is Padmāvatī's self-immolation for Ratnasena. He proceeds to say that in addition to manifesting itself literally in the form of fire, Beauty manifested itself in India in the form of idols--for India is the land \textit{par excellence} of image worship. Not only is India full of idols (\textit{but}) but they are, furthermore, intoxicated--\textit{Hind butkhānāh īst pur but-i mast}, "India is an idol-house filled with drunken buts."


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Sham‘ o Parvānah}, f.3.
What is one to make of this chain of associations? Where in the field of binary opposites defining the desirable and undesirable qualities might one place the Hindu, the Turk, India and Arabia? The chain of associations headed by the Hindu is followed by fire, which in the ghazal carries strong associations with Zoroastrians,\(^{18}\) whose practice of fire-worship fascinated ghazal writers as the very antithesis of Islam. Lastly, this list contains idolatry, yet another practice strongly condemned by Islamic law.

At a first glance, then, this half of the binary field seems to belong to the larger category of kufr—or the denial of the Qur’anic revelation. From the strictly legalistic point-of-view it represents the mirror-image of Islam—everything lying beyond the limits of acceptability for a Muslim. As such this half of the field would appear to define such undesirable, external values as the house of metaphors and the vision of the superficial reader, as opposed to his heart.

It is precisely such a neat classification that is both denied and inverted by Rāzī when he proceeds to point out that in India the fire of manifestation crackles the louder, and the reason for this is that in India the sun shines stronger.\(^{19}\) This seemingly simplistic statement turns on the use of the word mihr, meaning both ‘sun’ and ‘love’. Thus, on the one hand Rāzī claims that Indian heat causes Beauty to manifest itself more aggressively in India, and on the other that the manifestation is all the stronger for in India there is an

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\(^{18}\) For this association see Alessandro Bausani, _La Letteratura Persiana: Nuova Edizione Aggiornata_ (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1968), pp. 142-43.

\(^{19}\) _Sham’ o Parvânah_, f. 1.
excess of love, which presumably compels a fuller manifestation. The proof of this increased heat of love in the Indian landscape is Princess Padmāvati who burned herself literally for Ratnasena. Thus India is the land where the paradigmatic ideal of soz--prescribed simultaneously for the poetic subject, the author, and the reader--is most fully and literally realized.

This inversion of expected classifications is continued in the next few lines which take as their subject the other essentially Indian quality--image worship (*but parastī*). This point also presumes a pun obvious to Persian readers, but lost in English translation. The word for image--*but*--also means the 'human beloved'. Thus, when Rāzī names India as the land of idols, he refers to more than the physical landscape of India dotted with temples. He simultaneously implies that India is a land full of beloveds. He concludes his argument by pointing out that since *but parastī* (idolatry) is the essential characteristic of India, devotion to the beloved is also--by verbal similitude--an essentially Indian characteristic. 20

In Rāzī's reformulation India emerges as the ground where *ishq* finds its fullest expression and extension. The Indianness of the narrative is only superficially a catalogue of negative, un-Islamic qualities. In its essence (*haqīqat*) it is this Indianness which is crucial for the articulation of the ethical values demanded of the lover. The cluster of activities stereotypically associated with India--*safi* and *but parastī*--are perceived as desirable if seen within the framework of a lover's paradigm: the lover proves his worth by

adoring the but and by enduring soz, and it is only in India that both these activities are literally enacted.

The positive valorization of sathi as soz was not Rāzī's innovation. In the tradition of Persian poetry that honor must go to Nau‘ī Ḋhabūshānī who, as we have already seen, made sathi as soz the very centerpiece of his long poem half a century before Rāzī. Even here it can be said that Nau‘ī simply resurrected a metaphoric association which had been used at least once by an earlier Persian poet, and had become fairly well-known. As early as the fourteenth century Amīr Ḫusro of Delhi had already eulogized the practice in a couplet:

\[
\text{Cūṇ zan-i Hindū kāśī dar āshiqī dīvānah nīst} \\
\text{Sɒkhtān dar Sham‘ī kushtāh kār-ī har parvānah nīst.}
\]

In love there is none as mad as a Hindu woman
Where else is the moth which burns in a dead flame?\(^{21}\)

Thus embedded within the vocabulary of Indo-Persian poetry the image of the Hindu woman as the exemplary lover was elaborated and stretched to its poetic limits. The poet Nażīri at the court of Jahāngīr, went a step further when he addressed the beloved thus:

\[
\text{gar bah kufristān bārī in rū-yē ātishnāk rā} \\
\text{Barhaman ba-raqs mī āyad, keh ḫaq bah ātish ast.}\(^{22}\)
\]

If you show your radiant face in the land of kufr
The Brahmin will dance in joy, saying 'Truth (ḥaq) dwells in the fire'.


\(^{22}\) Nażīrī Nishāpurī, Divān edited by Mażāhir Musaffā (Tehran: Kitāb Kānah-ye Kabīr, n.d.), p. 44.
Here Khusro’s laudatory evaluation of sati as proof of the lover’s resolve is given a specifically metaphysical orientation by merging two conventionally discrete categories: on the one hand, the Brahmin, who as the keeper of the Hindu religious tradition is the kāfir (non-believer) par excellence, and on the other, the epiphany of Ultimate Truth (ḥaq) in the beloved’s radiant (literally ‘fiery’) face—a revelation normally only vouchsafed the sincere lover. Thus, fire-worship and sati—the very icons of Brahminic ignorance and idolatry—are deflected from their expected referent of disbelief (kufr), and emerge, instead, as epiphanies to the non-believing Brāhmaṇ.

To understand the literary import of this thread of associations beginning with Khusro and continuing through Nazīrī, Khabūshānī and Rāzi, it is useful to discuss them within the vocabulary and conceptual framework of Persian literary criticism. I had mentioned earlier that the basic metaphoric equation of passion with fire was a staple of Persian lyric poetry as, indeed, it is the staple of Indic poetry as well. What was unique to the Persian literary tradition (and also to the Urdu tradition derived from it) was the presentation of this metaphoric equation through the specific, concrete scenario of the lover as the moth and the beloved as the candle, flame, or lamp, which attract, but also scorch the moth. Within the vocabulary of Persian literary criticism

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23 The suffering nāyikā of Hindi love poetry (for example, in the Rasikapriyā of Keshavadāsa) also ‘burns’ in love, and a common trope shows cooling sandal paste being smeared on her limbs by solicitous friends.
such a scenario, or physical ‘enactment’, of a basic metaphoric equation, was called a ‘mażmūn’.

To simply translate ‘mażmūn’ as a ‘conventionalized scenario’, however, is to flatten its personality, for whereas a ‘scenario’ implies something contained and stable, a mażmūn, was understood by the Persian and Urdu literary traditions as a metaphoric scenario that sparks other related scenarios. Francis Pritchett has aptly described a mażmūn as the creation of a sequence of free-wheeling metaphoric equations.²⁴ Pritchett begins by drawing our attention to the fundamental realization of the beloved as innately cruel, for he/she is unresponsive to the lover’s attentions. This basic realization, she continues, yielded the master-mażmūn of the lover as a slayer of the beloved. In turn this master-mażmūn sparked any number of other mażmūns in the tradition of Perso-Urdu poetry: the beloved’s glances as arrows lodged in the lover’s heart, causing him to die slowly; alternately, the beloved’s tresses as a net which ensnares the lover like a hapless bird; and if the beloved is a hapless bird struggling in a net, then the lover might be a falcon—both because of his raptorial cunning, and because of his raptorial elegance.²⁵ These are all examples of mażmūns generated by, and in turn helping generate, further mażmūns.

²⁴ The following explanation of mażmūns is based on Francis Pritchett’s lucid discussion of this very fundamental building-block of both Persian and Urdu poetry in Nets of Awareness: urdu Poetry and Its Critics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 91-105.

²⁵ I have selected all but the last of these examples of mażmūns from Pritchett’s discussion, ibid., p. 93.
With respect to Rāzī and Nauʿī it is crucial to realize that in representing safi as soz, for the first time in a five hundred year old poetic tradition, they were extending the well-established mazmūn of the lover as the burning moth towards an unprecedented direction. If mazmūns are concrete dramatic enactments of abstract psychological truths, then the realization of the lover as doomed to burn achieves its greatest concretization in Soz o gudāz and Shamʿ o Parvānah—for here lovers burn literally.

This concretization of the mazmūn of burning may already have been attempted by Amīr Khusro in the fourteenth century but, as far as I can tell, it was also forgotten for the next two centuries. Till, at last, it was resuscitated by Nauʿī and made into the central pivot for his narrative. Half a century later Rāzī used it again as the central pivot of his composition, but now he employed it in the service of a new meaning—to draw a comparative moral/literary geography in which the relative positions of Persia, Arabia and India are reworked within the logic of a newly resurrected mazmūn. Thus, Nauʿī extended an existing, though mostly forgotten, mazmūn while Rāzī deflected it from its conventional meaning to a new one. In the technical vocabulary of Persian literary criticism Nauʿī was a mazmūn-āfrīn, a mazmūn-creator, and Rāzī a maʿnī-āfrīn, a meaning-creator—squeezing a new meaning from an old mazmūn. It is thus, I would argue, that both Soz o gudāz and Shamʿ o Parvānah deserve to be resuscitated and restored to our attention, even though they fail to delight us as much as do accepted classics like Jāyasī's Hindi Padmāvat, or the ghazals of Hāfiz and Rūmī. Neither Nauʿī Ḍhabūshānī nor ʿAqīl Ḍhān Rāzī may be great poets in the sense of
having bequeathed to us an enduring classic like *Padmāvat*, but if, instead, we focus our attention on identifying and understanding the ecology of a Persianate sensibility in its Indic environment then both Rāzī and Nauṭī mark a significant turn in the range of that sensibility.

But if there were sensibilities like Rāzī’s or Nauṭī’s which audaciously mined *safi* for its aesthetic possibilities, or Naẓīrī’s, which forged unexpected linkages between Brahmins, fire-worship and Truth, there were others which shrank from *safi* in a response perhaps more conventional. Such was the case of Ibn Baṭṭūṭā, the celebrated theologian and contemporary of Amīr Khusro, who traveled to India from North Africa, and was employed in the Tughluq bureaucracy as a religious lawyer (*qāẓī*). No sooner had Ibn Baṭṭūṭā reached Sindh, the threshold of the Indian sub-continent, than he found himself witness to a *safi* whose description he leaves us in his travelogue:

> I rode out with my friends to see the way in which the burning was carried out. After three miles we came to a dark place with much water and shady trees, amongst which were three pavilions, each containing a stone idol. Between the pavilions there was a basin of water over which dense shade was cast by trees so thickly set that the sun could not penetrate them. On reaching the pavilions the women descended to the pool, plunged into it and divested themselves of their clothes, which they distributed as alms. The place looked like a spot in hell! God preserve us from it.\(^26\)

Like all metaphors, *safi* too was elastic in its possibilities—a chameleon changing hues to the backdrop of varying sensibilities. The sensibilities

themselves varied with the logic inherent in a specific mythic or poetic paradigm. For poets like Khusro or Naẓīrī the interpretive prism for safī was predictably the lyric tradition of the ghazal with its conventionalized scenario of the flame and the moth, and its generic logic of burning as the self-effacement (fanā) necessary for union with the beloved.

Given what one knows of Ibn Baṭṭūṭā’s scholarly training and professional identity as an orthodox legal scholar (‘ālim) as well as judge (qāzī), one can well imagine that lyric paradigms may not have steered the course of his imagination as readily as Quranic precedents and legal injunctions about the human body. In the Quran the body in fire was unequivocally the body subjected to punishment—whether in hell or, as in the case of Abraham, on earth. The most memorable textual example of the terrestrial burning of a human body was, as we saw in the previous chapter, the narrative of the idol-worshippers’ attempt at burning Abraham in revenge for his destruction of their idols. In the Quran, therefore, burning not only evoked acts of punishment, but also of the metaphysical error (kufr) associated with idol-worship. It is telling that Abraham’s iconoclasm was rewarded by an act of divine intervention which transformed the idol-worshippers’ fire into a cool rose garden: in the logic of the Quran the believer does not burn, still less does he seek out burning as proof of his sincerity.

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It is the ethic implicit in such narrative paradigms which seems to have illumined Ibn Battūṭā’s passage through the Indian darkness, for in the sinister gloom which pervades his grove of idols we sense more than just a description of the Indian landscape. We sense, in addition, Ibn Battūṭā’s judgment on the landscape of the Indian mind. Given compelling paradigms like Abraham burning in the idol-house is it a mere accident that Ibn Battūṭā’s description of the Indian ṣafī should simultaneously reveal a sinister cess-pool of hell presided over by three idols?

In explaining the process by which Persianized Mughals reacted to ṣafī is it enough, then, to identify two basic channels of response—one rooted in lyric paradigms, and capable of mining ṣafī for its esthetic and literary possibilities, and the other rooted in the tradition of Islamic law, and thus revolted by it? I would say not, for this binarism flattens the complexity of the encounter between Mughal Muslims and India, as also it ignores the complexities and gradations within the Muslim culture of Mughal India. Educated Mughal Muslims had more than just two pure avenues of response at their intellectual disposal. It is a characteristic of historical memory to reduce and freeze historical characters primarily within one or another social role and then expect their responses and attitudes to flow from that particular viewpoint. Such a ‘freezing’, however, is a simplification which distorts the experience of historical personalities who, in the course of their actual lives, may be pulled in different directions, and called upon to occupy several intellectual, political and social niches. Thus, for example, a figure like Niẓām
al-Dīn Auliya is remembered almost exclusively as a mystic, whereas he was also a specialist in the study and academic interpretation of Islamic law.

With respect to Mughal Persianate responses to sāfī I want to emphasize that an educated Mughal Muslim could simultaneously draw upon both lyric and legal paradigms in articulating his responses. Such combinations and permutations of lyric and legal paradigms make it difficult to claim that Mughal theologians reacted to sāfī in one predictable way, and Mughal poets in another. An example of precisely such a complex response to India, Indic mythology and the burning of a human body is visible in an anecdote from the life of the eighteenth century Naqshbandī Sufi Saint Mirzā Mażhar Jān-i Jānān (1701-1781).28

Like any prominent Mughal Sufi Mirzā Mażhar was also trained as a scholar of hadīth and Quran, being initiated into the academic study of both by prominent scholars of early eighteenth-century Delhi. Again, like many Mughals he was initiated into multiple Sufi orders—the Qādirīs, the Chishtīs, and the Naqshbandīs. Of these three, however, his affiliation with the Naqshbandīs ultimately proved to be the most conspicuous, and it is primarily as a Naqshbandī of a fairly strict bent of mind that we now remember him. This association of Mirzā Mażhar with a particularly strict interpretation of Islamic law is only reinforced by his spiritual genealogy—Mażhar was active as a spiritual leader in an order that traced itself to Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindī, whom we encountered in a particularly severe moment

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28 For a short biography see Muhammad Umar, Islam in Northern India During the Eighteenth Century (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1993) pp. 70-87.
while he discouraged a Hindu from joining his circle of disciples. Perhaps the most telling incident which affords us a glimpse into Mazhar’s intellectual severity is about the circumstances of his death in 1781. Mazhar was shot dead by a Shi‘ah whom he had enraged by speaking bluntly about Shi‘ahs on the occasion of Muḥarram.

None of this prepares the historian for a surprising ‘liberality’ of opinions that Mazhar expressed at crucial points in his life about the position of Hindus and Hindu mythology. In one of these moments in his role as a spirititual leader of the Naqshbandī Mujaddidi order we see Mirzā Mazhar arguing that Hindus may not be called disbelievers (kāfirs), for like Christians and Muslims they too were vouchsafed divine revelation through prophets of their own—for Divine Mercy (rahmat allah) could not possibly leave out any human community: “Before the advent of Muhammad, the last of the Prophets,” said Mazhar, “a prophet was sent to every group of people (qaum), and it was incumbent upon that group to follow the orders and advice of that prophet, and not that of some other prophet.”29 Lest anyone object to this inclusion of India and Indians within the circle of prophetic revelation, Mazhar drew upon his scriptural knowledge to cite a verse from the Quran: “Of the prophets, we have mentioned some of them to you, and

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others we have not mentioned.\textsuperscript{30} Islamic law, he pointed out, is silent in the matter of providing an account of the prophets of India; therefore, it is preferable for Muslims to keep silent about the Indian prophets.

As a Muslim, however, Maţhar also felt compelled to point out that although India may have been privileged to receive a measure of revelation, the \textit{fullness} of divine revelation unfolded only with the coming of Muḩammad. The many revelations by the unnamed other prophets were, therefore, incomplete.

This is a subtle balancing act which acknowledges both the finality and pre-eminence of Quranic revelation and the imperfect nature of human comprehension. Nevertheless, the notable point here is that despite his normally severe attitude Maţhar was enough of a subtle textual scholar to grasp the ambiguities and silences in Islamic law regarding other religious communities, and he was flexible enough to include India within a scheme of successive revelations, albeit at a hierarchically lower position than either Christianity or Islam.

It was, however, the application of this theology to the specific instance of an Indic theme that is ultimately of most relevance to us in understanding the ways in which lyric and legal paradigms combined in the imaginative responses of Mughal Muslim intellectuals. On another occasion in an assembly of disciples a man came forth with a dream he had dreamt the night

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Quran} 4:164.
before, and presented it in hopes of gaining an explanation from one of the
gathered Şūfis.

In the dream the man had seen a wilderness (şahrā) full of fire.
Standing in the very midst of the fire was Krishñā, while Rām stood at its
dge. An explanation was immediately offered by one of the men in the
assembly. According to this explanation the fire was the fire of hell, and Rām
and Krishñā were being punished since they were the elders of the kafirs
(kubrā-ye kuffār-and dar ātish-i dozakh maʿżūb-and). Mirzā Mażhar,
however, disagreed with this and said, instead:

This dream has another interpretation (taʿbīr). It is legally
impermissible to fix upon any individual the charge of
disbelief (kufr), unless the charge is proven by the canon of
Islamic law. The Quran and the traditions of the Prophet are
silent about Rām and Krishñā. And it is clear from the
blessed Quranic line: ‘There is no village where there was no
warner,’ that there were indeed bringers of divine news
(nazīr o bashīr) in this community (jamaʿāt). Under the
circumstances it is probable that Rām and Krishñā were
saints or prophets (valī ya nabi). Rām Candra was the earlier
of the two, having been born at the time of the creation of
the jinn, and he taught the doctrine of the right-path
(nisbat-i suluk). Krishñā was the last of their elders, and
came during an era when the men’s lives were shorter and
their strength less. He taught the path of drawing close to
God through rapture (nisbat-i jaźbi). The many occasions of
vocal music and ecstatic dancing (ghanā o Šam‘) that are
reported about him are proof of his taste and fondness (zauq
o shauq) for the path religious ecstasy. Thus, his ardent love
appeared in the form of a field of fire, and Krishñā, who is
totally overpowered by the presence of love appears in the
midst of the fire. And Rām Candra, whose path is the path of
action, appeared at the edge of it.31

31 This letter is also reproduced in the Persian original by ‘Abdul Vali, p. 248-49.
In this touching interpretation we see Mirzā Maẓhar imparting an official sermon which blends the Quranic typology of time—with its successive prophetic revelations—with a Şūfi theology emphasizing jażb, intense emotional rapture inspired either through religious practice or through music. All of this is then placed by Maẓhar into the logical framework of lyric conventions with their association of burning with soz, rather than hell. Scripture, canon law, lyric and Şūfi theology combine to to create a remarkable validation of an Indic theme—and all from a theologian known to us for his severity in matters of interreligious contacts. The logic of lyric sentiments proved too compelling to be held entirely at bay by the bulwark of legal or scriptural precedents. Thus, it was not just in the matter of language choice that Mughals spoke “through throats where many rivers meet.”

I digress into Ibn Battūṭā's and Mirzā Maẓhar’s accounts not only to point out the two extremities of the range of interpretations which could be placed on India and safī, but also to emphasize the radical nature of the lyric formulation and its distance from the orthodox, Quranic paradigm. The lyric formulation of safī was not merely distant from the logic of the Quran and Quranic law (shari'ah), but was its inversion. As such the generic logic of the lyric fully participated in that antinomian strain which has historically distinguished Sufism from Islamic orthodoxy. As Bruce Lawrence has rightly pointed out:
"a major thrust of Sufism has been to decondition. While most disciplines mould would-be adepts into the role that fulfills social, as also economic and political expectations, Sufism attempts to thwart even the most sacred precepts of Islamic belief, just as it subverts the time-sanctioned norms of Islamic life. Sufism advocates deconditioning by remaining defiantly paradoxical."  

It should come as no surprise that Rāzī--especially remembered by his biographer Navāz Kān for his mastery of Rūmī’s encyclopaedic mystical poem Mašnavī-ye Ma’nāvī, and a practicing Ṣūfī initiated into the order of Shaikh Burhānuddīn Rāz-i Ilāhī--was inclined to follow the Ṣūfī-lyric paradigm when retelling the Padvāvalī-narrative in Persian. In conformity with the inversionary logic of this paradigm satī emerges as much more than simply a metaphor of fanā--the ‘death’ of the lover/mystic’s will and individual ego. It emerges, first, as an instance of kufr--a specifically Indian form of kufr. To simply claim that Rāzī interprets satī as fanā is to deaden the delicious ambiguity of his poetic imagination by reducing a pivotal motif of the Padvāvalī-narrative to a single valence. It must in the same breath be stated that Rāzī accepts the conventional and negative association of fire-worship and satī with kufr. But it is because he permits himself this venerable, though pejorative, association that in the inversionary logic of Ṣūfī-lyric formulations Rāzī can simultaneously present satī as an exemplification of īmān (belief). The paradoxical formulation of satī as both kufr and īmān make it a particularly apt signifier for fanā, for now the equation rests on more than just the physical similarity of the burning moth

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with the burning woman. The similarity between *safi* and *fanā* is shown to be conceptual when Razī collapses the dichotomies of *kufr* and *īmān* in the same way as *fanā* is held to render such dichotomies meaningless for the lover-mystic who experiences it through Ṣūfī discipline. With its paradoxical interpretation as both *kufr* and *īmān*, *safi* becomes a perfect poetic vehicle for the explication of a Ṣūfī ontology which defined Truth (*ḥaq*) as attainable only through the transcendence of multiplicities and dichotomies.33

Is Razī's formulation simply a positive valorization of India consistent with the generic logic of the lyric and Sufic paradigms, or is it part of a larger argument? We see that the ethnic polarities of Hindu and Turk, and the associated geographic polarities of India and Arabia can be subsumed within a larger set of conceptual binaries which may be called the categories of *kufr*--the denial of Quranic revelation--and *dīn*--its acceptance and formulation in the community of Muslims.

Razī explicitly makes this connection of the binaries to the larger category of *kufr* when at the end of the preamble he says:

Although this path I take is that of *kufr*

'ishq is a thing apart from *dīn* and *kufr*

'ishq is freed from the fetters of *Sharī'ah* (Islamic law)

'ishq is the foundation, the rest is the edifice

'ishq is the essence, and the created world the realm of attributes

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but the attributes have no permanence without this essence.\textsuperscript{34}

It is useful to understand these lines within the framework of Islamic theology which consistently uses contrasting pairs of words for the description of God who manifests himself in the form of myriad and often seemingly contradictory attributes such as kindness (\textit{lutf}) and violence (\textit{qahr}), or \textit{jamāl} (beauty) and \textit{jalāl} (power). These attributes, however, are accidents and not the abiding essence of God's being. God's essence (\textit{zāl}) transcends such attributes.\textsuperscript{35} The attributes are the externalities necessary for a manifestation of God's essence in the world of time and space. The attributes are the metaphors, and divine essence the referent.\textsuperscript{36}

It is this point that is stressed by Rāżī when he finally claims that '\textit{ishq} is the essence. In Rāżī's formulation, '\textit{ishq} is the experience in which all contradictory attributes find their resolution. Thus, \textit{kufār} and \textit{dīn} are ultimately insignificant distinctions, just as Arabia and India, Turk and Hindu are trivial in and of themselves, and significant only as the specific delimitations of a larger field of binaries which Rāżī calls the '\textit{kainat-i sifat}--

\textsuperscript{34}Sham' o Parvānah, f. 6.


\textsuperscript{36}The ontology implied by Rāżī's poem was most clearly systematized by the thirteenth-century Andalusian philosopher Ibn al-'Arabī. As a poet and practising Sufi Rāżī is much more forthcoming about his debt to both earlier poets (such as Rūmī) and to specific Sufi Shaikhs (Burhānuddīn Rāż-i Ilāhī). He does not, however, identify himself with any particular school of philosophy. The echoes of Ibn al-'Arabī's \textit{Vaḥdat al-Vujūd, Philosophy of Existential Unity} are, however, unmistakable. For Ibn al-'Arabī see, William Chittick, \textit{The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).
'the created world of attributes'. It is this dichotomous multiplicity of attributes which dazzles the vision of the superficial viewer and reader. It is only when the viewer grasps the matter with the eyes of his heart--as would a lover or a mystic--that the dualities of kufr and dīn, Hindu and Turk pale in significance. It is ‘ishq, in other words, which levels the house of metaphors where the ogler begins his foray into the tale.
CHAPTER SIX

INTERTEXTUALITIES: LIBERATING THE FALCON OF MEANING

muddu‘a ‘anqā hai apne ‘ālam-i tahrīr kā

...Meaning’s the falcon
that soars beyond the world of words

Mīrzā Ghālib

VI.1 Readerly Intertexts

The texts I discussed in the previous two chapters could all be placed under the rubric of literary strategies used by Muḥgal authors to make sense of an unambiguously Indic theme by reconciling it to two frames of reference: the Persianate and the Islamic. Thus, for example, by invoking the Abrahamic garden, Nau‘ī brought the strange fact of safi within the familiar conceptual framework of an episode in the life of a Prophet revered by Muslims. Similarly, Rāżī’s tripartite reformulation of safi as the ardour of love (soz), as the extinguishing of the individual self (fanā), and as a metaphor for the
principle of metaphysical unity (*tauḥīd*) are all responses which reconceptualize an Indian ritual within a specifically Ṣūfī theological framework. Such responses revalorize an Indic theme by clothing it in a new layer of meanings more familiar to a Persianized Muslim readership. They are the steps by which Persianized authors, patrons and readers 'made' new meanings, and new *maẓmūns*, by combining themes from two very different literary and religious traditions.

I will speak now of a different and more literal manner in which a Muḥgal Persianized author spun meaning out of a Hindi text. Like Naʿūrī's reference to Abraham's garden Muḥammad Shākir's marginal jottings are also exercises in intertextual remembering; however, the grain of this intertextuality is much finer, for here the reader brings the Hindi text into a closer proximity with Persian by reading it through the lens of specific poetic fragments, not conventional dramatic scenarios known to all educated Mughals. Thus, if Naʿūrī's remembrance of the Abrahamic garden opened for us a vista onto the workings of a Persianate response to an Indic theme, Shākir's remembrance of specific lines holds up a magnifying glass to that literary ecology. We now see less the grand sweep of a Muḥgal Persianate imagination, but much more a up-close view of its component parts.

Shākir's marginal jottings illustrate a very different kind of response from Naʿūrī's in yet another way. Naʿūrī's allusion to the Abrahamic garden was so neatly embedded in the narrative of *Soz o gudāz*, so deliberately planned a culmination to the tale, that we may call it a product of authorial
artifice. There was nothing spontaneous about Nau'rī's invocation of Abraham in the funeral pyre.

Šākir's remembrance of Persian verse fragments, on the other hand, preserves a record of his most darting impulses as he reads, translates, and transcribes the Hindi text of Jāyasī's Padmāvat. To track these impulses is to view the deft twists by which the Perso-Muslim imaginaire negotiated its Indic environment. The readerly responses which occurred spontaneously to Muhammad Šākir preserve a cross-section of his imagination with somewhat the same immediacy as pre-historic creatures fossilized in mid-action by an eruption of volcanic ash may preserve for the paleontologist a palimpsest of the most fleeting interactions between life-forms of an otherwise inaccessible era. This palimpsest of readerly intertextual reminiscences reveals a modality of meaning that interpreters of Padmāvat (and other Indic texts) have previously ignored. In recent studies of Padmāvat, such as by John Millis or Shyām Manohar Pāṇḍey, much emphasis has been placed on understanding the total allegorical meaning of the poem within a Šūfi theological framework. Thus, for example, John Millis maps the meaning of Padmāvat according to an allegorical scheme in which the characters correspond to different elements in Šūfi psychology. In this scheme of allegorical correspondences Ratnasena is the human soul (rūḥ) being offered a transformative glimpse of divine wisdom (ʿaql, personified by Princess Padmāvati) through the benign mediation of the Šūfi pir (personified by the wise parrot Hīrāmanī). The final union of the soul with divine wisdom,
however, can only happen after the soul has forsaken its baser instincts (*nafs*),
personified by Ratnasena’s scheming wife Nāgmatī.\(^1\)

As Aditya Behl has rightly commented, such totalizing allegoresis
reduces the complex narrative of *Padmāvat* to a simplistic set of
correspondences.\(^2\) Totalizing allegorical codes are also questionable, for
rarely can all the narrative elements of a complex narrative like *Padmāvat* be
fitted precisely into an allegorical grid. But besides being mechanistic, such
allegorical interpretations share one other feature: they all locate meaning
squarely and exclusively within the body of the text as written by the author,
determined by critical editions. They all share the assumption that the
elements present within a canonical version of the text circumscribe the range
of its meanings. In such interpretations the falcon of meaning never soars
beyond the web of words and images frozen in the text by its author.

Muhammad Shākir’s manuscript points us to a different direction in
our search for meaning. As we have already seen in two examples of his
readerly responses to Jáyasī’s *Padmāvat*, Muhammad Shākir did not confine
himself to Jáyasī’s Hindi text; instead, he ranged freely in bringing extra-
textual, as well as extra-lingual, echoes to his reading and transcribing of
Jáyasī. Furthermore, as we saw in his remembrance of the episode between
Nizām al-Dīn Auliyā and ‘Alāuddīn Khālījī, such readerly responses could
significantly alter the meaning of the text beyond what Jáyasī may have


included in the ‘original’ written version. From this pattern of reading and remembering we can gather one telling detail: for Muḥammad Shākir the pleasure—and therefore the meaning—of his task lay as much in the original Hindi text as in the poetic echoes he could subsequently bring to bear upon it from his own storehouse of memories. From the viewpoint of such a reading much of Padmāvat’s meaning lay in its power to evoke reminiscences of Persian and Arabic poetry. The Hindi text of Padmāvat was meaningful to the extent that it could serve as the anchor for two other systems of poetry held in high esteem by a Persianized Muslim reader. Muḥammad Shākir’s marginal jottings define that wider horizon in which the falcon of meaning may soar at will. It is this horizon of meanings which is ignored by interpreters seeking to explain Padmāvat solely within the parameters of its formal authorial features. In focusing exclusively on the authored text such interpretations ignore a fundamental strategy of extra-textual responses which Muslim Persianized readers used in order to make Indic texts meaningful to themselves.

In thus ‘revivifying’ the Hindi text with his own poetic reminiscences Muḥammad Shākir was far from reticent. The manuscript he bequeathed us swims in his readerly additions. To bring some order to this irrepressible flood of reminiscences we can discuss them as belonging to two broad linguistic categories: the Persian, and the Arabic. Shākir’s Arabic additions to the Hindi text are mostly fragments from the Quran and, in one case, the ḥadīṣ, while his more numerous Persian additions are either couplets (ash’ār) or half-couplets (miṣra’i) from the canon of classical Persian poets, specifically
Hāfiz and Jāmī. When remembering and adding verses by famous canonical poets Shākir conveniently labels them as to their authorship. The bulk of Persian verse fragments added by Muḥammad Shākir, however, are anonymous, and all of these share the common characteristic of being simple, short and ditty-like. The eagerness with which Shākir proclaims the lofty parentage of some couplets provokes a question about the others. Are the unlabelled fragments the spontaneous creations of Muḥammad Shākir himself as he engaged the Hindi text in a dialogue?\(^3\)

To plod methodically through the entire tangle of Shākir’s marginalia would be more than just a tedious exercise in cataloguing, it would be a distraction from the central issue of the relationship between Persianate and Indic imaginaires. Thus, in leading us through a few examples of Shākir’s intertextual marginal additions to Jáyasī’s Padmāvat I will hold before us the beacon of two related issues: how does a specific type of Persian or Arabic fragment enlarge and deepen the field of meaning in the Hindi text, and what such reminiscences show us about the Persianization or Islamicization of an Indic literary field.

**VI.2 Equivalences:**
**Mount Kailāsh and Sinai**

In traversing the terrain of Muḥammad Shākir’s readerly imagination it helps to begin with him in the first few stanzas of his scribal undertaking,

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\(^3\) This possibility was suggested to me by Carl Ernst who helped me make my way through the sometimes impossible orthography of Muḥammad Shākir’s manuscript.
for by so doing we follow two rhythms--the rhythm of Jāyasī’s narrative as it proceeds from its prologue to the story of the two lovers, and also the rhythm of Shākir’s flashes of memory. Shākir’s memory for Persian and Arabic did not serve him equally well at all stages of his copying Jāyasī’s tale. At the very beginning of his scribal undertaking Shākir’s mind seems abuzz with a host of Persian and Arabic fragments, and his hand eager to record them all on the margins. But somewhere half-way through this lengthy manuscript his imagination begins to sag, or his fingers grow unwilling to exert themselves at the margins, so that the latter half of Shākir’s manuscript is largely barren of marginalia. By beginning at the very beginning of the manuscript we encounter Shākir’s memory at its most voluble.

Jāyasī, on the other hand, steps gingerly into his text. He swaddles the tale of the two lovers in a number of conventionalized ‘frames’, the first of which is a eulogy to the ‘creator’:

I remember, first, the One Maker (kartārū)
Who bestowed the spark of life
and made the World (sansārū)
Who sparker the flash of light (pargāsū)
Then made Mount Kailāš (kabilāsū)
Who fashioned fire and air, earth and water
Who made the spectrum for the seeing eye
Who fixed the Heavens, Earth and Netherworld (sarag patārū)
And then the endless chain of incarnations (avatārū)
Who divided Brahma’s world in seven zones. 4

4 Padmāvat, 1.4-5. All references are to Mātāprasāda Gupta’s critical edition; the first number is the sorthā, the second the verse within the sorthā. All references in Muhammad Shākir’s manuscript are to the folio, then sorthā and, finally, the verse. In his critical edition Mātāprasāda Gupta includes some sorthās that Muhammad Shākir does not. Thus, the sorthā numbers in the critical edition and the manuscript do not match up perfectly. Nor does Muhammad Shākir number the sorthās sequentially through the manuscript. Each of the
One of the most persistent and remarkable features of Jāyasī is his choice of Sanskrit derived (tadbhava) words. Thus, the creator whom Jāyasī extols in the opening is 'kartārū' (from the Sanskrit 'kartā', 'doer'), and his illumination is 'pargāsū' (from the Sanskrit 'prakāśa'). It is more, however, than just the Sanskrit-derived lexicon that stamps Padmāvat with an unmistakably Indic texture. In the opening stanza one of the very first creations is Mount Kailāsh, the alpine abode of the God Shiva and his wife Pārvaṭī. Thus, not only does Jāyasī cast his Hindi Padmāvat within a linguistically Sanskritic mould, but even the cosmology he delineates is Indic- or, to be more specific, pointedly Shaivite. Established prominently in the opening verse of the Hindi Padmāvat, the Shaiva cosmology is then threaded throughout the text by Jāyasī. For example, when we finally reach the tale of the two lovers, Princess Padmāvaṭī's kingdom in Singhala is described as a Kailash-like paradise, and when the two lovers finally meet surreptitiously, it is through the benign mediation of Shiva. If the four basic elements are not a specifically Shaivite or Indic element, the avatārs through whom the creator expresses himself in the physical world certainly are. And if by the seven zones of creation Jāyasī may have had in mind the Perso-Arabic concept of

folios in the manuscript contains two sorthās. Each sorthā, in turn contains eight couplets. A folio in the manuscript consists, therefore, of sixteen lines belonging to either the first or the second sorthā on the folio. In citing the manuscript I will list three numbers: first the folio, the second the sorthā, and finally the verse in the sorthā. The passage just quoted corresponds to folio 1a, sorthā 1, verses 1-5 (1a: 1.1-5).
the 'seven climes' (*haft iqlim*)\(^5\) into which medieval Muslim geographers divided the known world, then what do we make of these seven worlds being contained in 'Brahmā's embryonic world' (*Brahmānda*)?

It is this generally Indic, and specifically Shaivite, textual world that Muhammad Shākir entered for the space of 166 folios when he began transcribing and translating the Hindi text by a fellow Ṣūfī. And in his methodical translation of the Hindi text he began a process that was more than simply a linguistic replacement of the Sanskritic term by its Perso-Arabic equivalent. In the interlinear spaces between the Hindi text of the just-mentioned opening stanza Shākir writes the following Persian 'translation':

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Yād kunam yak khudā, har ke Jān dādah, kardah 'ālam. Kardah ē avval raushanī zāhir, kardah ē az ān kūh mahal-hā... Kardah ē rang ba rang paidāish. (1a:1.1-5)}
\end{align*}
\]

I remember the one God, who bestowed life on every one, and made the universe. First he made light, and from that mountainous places, and he made a variety of living things.

At two points in this translation Shākir makes an interpretive leap that alters the very cosmology of the Hindi text; first, when he translates 'Mount Kailāsh' as 'mountainous places' (*kūh mahal-hā*), and then again a little further when he presents Jāyasī's avatāras as 'living things' (*paidāish*).\(^6\) His is a translation that generalizes away the specificities of Jāyasī's text to such

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\(^6\) In Iranian Persian the word means 'that which is clear', however, Shākir, I believe, is using the term in its Indian meaning of 'something which is born'.
an extent that it strips the eulogy of all its sacral associations—for within the frame of Shaiva cosmology Mount Kailāś is emphatically not just any mountainous place; it is, instead, the mountain chosen by Shiva as his otherworldly abode, and his by worshippers as their principal pilgrimage destination. It is not just a mountain, but the hallowed mountain. Nor is an ‘avatāra’ merely another in a series of ‘born things’, but a remarkable incarnation of Shiva (or Vishṇu) for a specific duration and purpose.

Here it may, of course, be argued that in translating into Persian Muḥammad Shākir was restricted not only by the lexical, but also the conceptual properties of Persian. That since the Perso-Islamic imaginaire lacks the very concept of an avatāra, Shākir had but two choices as a translator. He could either retain the Sanskrit ‘avatāra’ in his Persian translation (and thus acknowledge the essential untranslatability of the concept), or he could do what he did when he translated it with the Perso-Arabic ‘paidaish’ with all the inherent dangers of flattening the range of connotations that the term has in its Indo-Shaivite cultural contexts.

In the choice that he made, however, Shākir still had available to him a range of Persian words that would have lent his translation a very different texture. By the end of the seventeenth century when Shākir wrote his translation, there was already a considerable Indo-Persian tradition of understanding the Hindu avatars as functional analogues of the prophets (nabi) in the Abrahamic traditions. The polemical Şūfī writer ‘Abd al-Rahmān Chishti, for example, made precisely such a ‘translation’ in his mid-
seventeenth century tract Mirât al-Makhlûqât (The Mirror of Creation).7 And, as we have already seen, so did Mirzâ Mażhar Jân-i Jânân when he explained Krshna and Râm as two prophets vouchedsafed Hindus before the advent of Muḥammad, and asserted, furthermore, that Krshna’s revelation was the superior, for, being the latter prophet, Krshna could reveal the path of love more completely than Râm.8

The evolution of prophetic messages through successions of increasingly complete divine self-disclosures is not, of course, an exact understanding of an avatâra, but my point is that the well-established hermeneutic tradition of translating ‘avatâra’ as ‘nabi’ preserved many of the sacred associations of avatâra-hood. It also preserved the benign, mediating function of an avatâra that Shâkir’s translation of ‘paidâish’ (live things) erases completely. Shâkir may have been restricted by the lexical possibilities of Persian, but this still left him with a range of choices that would have flattened the Indo-Shaivite flavour of Padmâvat much less radically.9


9 For another example of a ‘deliberate simplification’ of Hindu mythology in a Persianate milieu see John Seyller’s comments on the iconography of Hindu Gods in the Mughal Râmâyana: John Seyller, Workshop and Patron in Mughal India: The Freer Râmâyana of ‘Abd al-Râhîm (Zurich: Artibus Asiae, 1999), pp. 81-83. The two instances of
Shākir's choice leads me to conclude that for him the significance of the Hindi text was not in the surprising (or anomalous) use of a Shaiva cosmology by an earlier fellow-Śūfi. Instead, it seems that for him the point and significance of the Indic text lay in its malleability, in how, and to what extent it could be made to inhabit a Persianate or Islamic universe. And here, if we compare Shākir to Jāyasī, we see two rather different textures of a Mughal Persianate sensibility, for in Jāyasī's literary imagination the categories of Indo-Shaivite mythology and theology were not simply the colourful backdrops to a Śūfi tale; they were, instead, the elements which could actively and creatively be combined to make the alloy of Padmāvat.

If in his interlinear translations Shākir generalized the specificities of the Hindi text, bleaching out those references which lent it an unmistakably sacred character within a Shaivite cosmological frame, then in his marginal intertextual remembrances he revalorized those elements within a specifically Quranic framework of allusions. A few stanzas later we glimpse this reverse process in action as Shākir comments in the margins on a Hindi line in which Jāyasī extolls the creator's omnipotence:

"That greatest King of all robs the earthly kings of their parasols, while shielding the powerless who are exposed. He makes the mountains crumble in plain sight, and makes a mere ant an elephant's equal" (Padmāvat 6.3-4).

'simplification', however, are not identical, for the painters illustrating the manuscript seem to have simplified the Hindu Gods' iconography to enable the viewer to recognize them more quickly. Shākir, however, simplifies the Hindu and Indic elements because he seems less-interested in them.
In the margins next to the word 'mountain' (parbat) Shākir scribbles in Persian the following clause: “kūh-i ṭūr rā vaqt-i tažallī ba ḥaẓrat-i Mūsā”, which translates as, “To Mt. Sinai at the time of the epiphany to Lord Moses” (2a: 2.3-4). It is but a broken clause, yet enough to show the interpretive lens through which Shākir read the Hindi text. In extolling God’s power to reduce the highest to a low station, and vice-versa, Ja`yasī seems not to have intended any specific king or mountain, nor any specific historical incident. Indeed, Ja`yasī’s point about the strange workings of divine will is perfectly clear as a general statement of reversals of fortune.

Upon encountering the phrase ‘crumbling mountain’ (parbat dhāh) Shākir, however, remembered a very specific mountain—Mount Sinai (kūh-i ṭūr) at the time of God’s revelation to Moses. The Quranic allusion is to the famous episode of Moses beseeching God to reveal himself visually, and God responding with the famous words ‘lan taranī’, “You will not see me.” (Sura 7:134). God stipulates that if Mount Sinai withstands the full force of divine self-disclosure then Moses may view his full self-disclosure. Moses, as is well known, was sobered by the crumbling mountain.

This instance of Shākir’s marginal addition reveals the associative process, (Barthes’ ‘combinatory systematic’) by which the meaning of an Indic text was extended into a specifically Islamic sphere of reference. The possibility of such an extension is of course latent in any reading, and it may also have been present in the authorial imagination of Ja`yasī, who had a similar education as Muḥammad Shākir. We will never be sure of this, for in reconstructing the mental world of Muḥammad Ja`yasī we have only the text
of *Padmāvat* to go by. But whether or not this associative possibility suggested itself to Jāyasī we can be sure that Jāyasī did not intend his reader to make this associative leap at this particular juncture of *Padmāvat*, for he did not include any clues that might nudge the reader think of Mount Sinai or Moses. Nonetheless, the mere mention of a crumbling mountain was enough to spark Quranic associations in the readerly imagination of Muḥammad Shākir—the overwhelmingly Indo-Sanskritic texture of the Hindi *Padmāvat* notwithstanding.

This instance of readerly additions to the field of meaning yields more than just a glimpse into the process by which Mughal readers Islamicized Indic texts in ways not necessarily intended by their original authors, it also offers a glimpse into the linguistic motor driving this readerly transformation. The episode of Moses on Mount Sinai is famous enough, and Muḥammad Shākir was erudite enough, that had he so wished he could have quoted the Mount Sinai vignette in the original Arabic words of the Quran. That his immediate impulse was, instead, to paraphrase the vignette in Persian offers us a clue as to his linguistic fluencies. It was not just the Hindi text of Jāyasī’s *Padmāvat*, but also his own memory of Quranic passages that Shākir filtered through the medium of Persian. As we will see in the very next example, Shākir did sometimes remember and record the Quran in the Arabic original, but these were exceptional instances. Mostly, throughout the space of the

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10 When Jāyasī does intend the reader to make a certain associative leap he is quite assertive in including clues to insure that the reader will follow in a suggested groove. For example, later in the text where Jāyasī intends to present the afflicted and love-lorn Ratnasena as a second Mansur al-Ḥallāj, he explicitly mentions Ḥallāj by name.
manuscript Shākir remained reluctant to think in anything but Persian, just as he remained indifferent to the generalizing effects of his 'translation' upon the Indo-Shaivite cosmology sketched by Jāyasi.

VI.3 Quranic Intertext: Lakes That See no Swans

One of the very few occasions when Shākir does think and write in Arabic is worth lingering on, for by so doing we acknowledge the presence of yet another player in the already complex ecology of Hindi in the Persianate Mughal world. The textual occasion which provoked this Arabic response was the eighty-fourth stanza of Padmāvat, where the narrative begins to set around the core a love triangle that persists throughout the rest of the tale. The magical parrot Hirāmanī has just been brought into the court of Chittaur where he has both charmed and astounded everyone with his wit and human eloquence. He has piqued both the reader's and King Ratnasena's curiosity by singing the praises of a bewitchingly beautiful, yet distant, Princess from Singhala. The king is predictably on his way to becoming infatuated, and will soon be warned of the snare of love by his courtiers in Hindi, and simultaneously in Persian by Muḥammad Shākir using words borrowed from Hāfiz (as we saw in chapter one). In the meantime, however, the news of both the eloquent parrot and the distant beauty courses through the palace, where it is of immense interest to Nāgmafi, the eldest wife of Ratnasena. As is her wont, Queen Nāgmafi sits primping herself before a mirror, and summons the parrot to her chamber, where she subjects him to a volley of questions: "It
may well be that he [Ratnasena] has a hundreded other lovers; but tell me, are any half as lovely as me?" Nāgmaṭi asks smilingly at first. But then she probes more frantically: "Tell me, parrot, in your eyes who's the lovelier, I or that Padmīnī?" (83:7)

The parrot just smiles in response as he spies the mounting uncertainty. When finally he answers, it is with a barb:

Of course the lake that sees no graceful swans
Thinks every heron to be the height of beauty.
But God has made the world such a perfect marvel
That forms exceed each other in the matter of beauty.
And when was beauty found through machinations?
Who's lovely, and who's not, is hard to say
For only she's lovely who's desired by her Lord (84:2-6).

Assured that his taunt has found its mark, the parrot withdraws, leaving the queen to her plots and jealousies. She will hatch these for the rest of Jáyasi's tale, and they will form an occasional side-narrative to the love affair between Ratnasena and Padmāvati.

At this point in the Hindi text Shākir remembers one of the very few Quranic fragments that he leaves us in the margins. Next to the line about the created world producing forms which surpass each other, Shākir writes just four Arabic words from the second chapter of the Quran:

*Fazzlanā ba'zahum 'alā ba'zin* (2: 253)

We have made some excel over others.

And then, as if compelled by the sheer inertia of translating pages upon pages into Persian, Shākir adds a precise Persian translation of the Quranic
fragment in miniscule letters in the interlinear spaces between the Arabic words: *buzurgī dādah-īm baʿzīhā bar baʿzīhā*.

Since Shākir remembered the Quran well enough to be able to isolate just four words from an entirely unremarkable passage, we might ask why he chose this particular textual moment to introduce them in the margins and, more importantly, how they deepen the meaning of Jāyasi's Hindi stanza. To answer this let us first determine the direction in which Jāyasi nudges his readers in this vignette of budding domestic jealousy.

Sensitized to the excesses of male privilege in a hierarchical society, we may well find it hard to join the parrot in his sly mockery of a wife about to be rejected--but that would be an inappropriately modern reading, for Jāyasi does invite the reader to join the knowing parrot in his taunts. In the logic of the text Queen Nāgmatī is certainly not meant to be lavished with readerly sympathies; in fact, her very name--Serpentress--suggests the caution the reader must cultivate towards her. She is the butt of jokes--the shrill and scheming wife who keeps her husband from his quest for beauty, love and spiritual transformation. Given her scheming, jealous, and vain nature it is no surprise that Pādmāvati should excel her--just as in God's marvellous world forms constantly excel each other, both physically and morally.

This, I would argue, is not a particularly philosophic moment in Jāyasi's text. It is, instead, a particularly light turn, for given the hierarchical (and misogynist?) world-view of pre-modern readers, the beginnings of a squabble between two jealous wives would surely have held the promise of a delicious diversion. It is this promise that is hinted by the parrot's sly and
knowing smile. This is not, in other words, a grave or abstruse moment needing the support of a Quranic quotation. And it is precisely this that makes the addition of the Quranic fragment about God preferring some over others so delightfully funny and ironic. Feminine jealousy and domestic squabbles seem all the more absurd when juxtaposed against the weight of a Quranic passage. Here we have Quranic Arabic being invoked in the service of humor, and not, as we might expect, as an imprimatur on a particularly abstruse or complicated argument. In the literary ecology of Hindi in Mughal India both Persian and Arabic played active roles in the readers' imaginations, but not necessarily with the gravity we associate with the uses of a classical language hallowed by a canonical text.

VI.4 Poetic Intertexts: Hacking the Limbs of Majnun

The far commoner type of intertext that Shākir used to embellish the meaning of Jāyasi’s text, however, was the Persian couplet lifted from a remembered ghazal. The specific couplet which suggested itself to Shākir’s readerly imagination was triggered by either an image or a word in the Hindi text, and we have already seen one example of such a spontaneous ‘trigger’ in the introductory chapter where Shākir remembered the famous opening couplet of Hāfiẓ’ Divān to add his voice to that of the courtiers warning the king of the snares of love. I will present one other instance where Shākir remembers a Persian couplet. He does not name its author, and so,
presumably, it was composed spontaneously by Shākir himself during his transcription of the Hindi text.

A third of the way into Jāyasī's narrative the ardent Ratnasena finds out just how hard the path of love can be—not because his beloved doesn't return his affections, but because her father, Gandharvasena, is staunchly opposed to the affair. Gandharvasena, however, can hardly be blamed, for in surreptitiously approaching Padmāvatī, Ratnasena and his followers have assumed the guise of scruffy Shaivite yogis, so that they hardly seem fitting suitors for a princess. The cultural logic of the ardent lover's transformation into an emaciated ascetic would have resonated richly with both Hindu and Muslim readers, for the trope of the impassioned lover being reduced by his passion to an ascetic indifference to the rest of the world was common in both Indic and Persian literatures. Here, however, Jāyasī chose an allusion that clothed the ascetic Ratnasena in a specifically Šūfī garb. He made Ratnasena laugh at his tribulations, as had the famous Šūfī martyr Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj at the moment of his execution. This is how Jāyasī developed the scene: Ratnasena finds himself in exactly the same predicament as Ḥallāj when Padmāvatī's father captures him, has him chained, and drags him to the gibbet to be executed. Then, just as he is about to be killed, Gandharvasena offers him one last wish—a moment to remember whomever he chooses. Ratnasena, predictably, chooses his beloved:

I remember her at whose mere mention
My life offers itself to fate.
Every drop in my veins cries "Padmāvatī"
Every drop, if I live, shall enshrine her name
And if I fall, it's with that name upon my lips (262:4-5)
Finally, as the trumpets ring out and the spikes of the gibbet become visible to Ratnasena, says Jāyasī, "That Maṣūr laughed out loud." (261:5).

It is at this point that Shākir writes in the margins the following Persian verse:

\[
\text{Nām-i Lailī bar āyad andar naqsh} \\
\text{gar barīzand khūn-i Majnūn rā} (67: 2.1)
\]

It is the name of Laili that blood-clots spell
When they hack the limbs of the hapless Majnūn

And with this allusion to the legend of the tragic lovers, Lailā and Majnūn, the identity of Ratnasena acquires yet another layer of meaning—the Chittaurī king, who is simultaneously an emaciated Shaivite ascetic, is also a famous Sūfi martyr. And now, through the alchemy of a marginal remembrance, he becomes Majnūn. The Sanskritic, Persianate, and Islamic horizons of reference all merge to accomodate the swift flight of the falcon of meaning.

VI. 5 The Hadīṣ Intertext: Hindi as Food for the Soul

Besides the occasion of the Quranic fragment there is only one other instance of Shākir thinking and scribbling in Arabic—and that is on the very last page of the manuscript. Upon concluding the story with Princess Padmāvaṭī's death on the pyre, Ratnasena's on the battlefield, and Chittaur's in the siege, Shākir wrote a brief and business-like addendum (folio 166) in
which he tells us his full name as well as his father’s (Shaikh Nur Muhammad); his place of birth (Amroha); the date and the exact hour of the completion of his translation (the hour of the third namaz of the day). With these specifics out of the way, he stamped his beautifully calligraphed seal to the addendum, preparing the manuscript for accession in his library. But the seal was not to be the last word, for there are several more, unnumbered, pages beyond it. It was on one of these unnumbered pages that Muhammad Shakir lingered a good while—as though he couldn’t tear himself away from Jaiyas’s company. On this last page he wrote unfettered, for here there are neither margins, nor columns here, nor yet any Hindi text around which to squeeze in his remembrances. And finally, here he wrote in all three of his languages—Hindi, Persian and Arabic—, thereby neatly summing up his linguistic reach.

The Arabic writing is in a very bold hand in several registers on the top half of the page, and it consists of three non-canonical hadis (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), while the Hindi couplets are on the bottom half. Sprinkled liberally and unobtrusively throughout this page is one other Arabic word—the sacred Arabic syllable "HU", meaning "He", and referring to the unnameable, divine essence. This macaronic jumble of scribbles is the final seal upon Muhammad Shakir’s manuscript. They will be the seal on mine as well, for in dwelling upon them we will have come to the end of the play of Shakir’s imagination through the intricacies of his three worlds: Hindi, Persian and Arabic.
The Arabic hadīs, the Hindi couplets, and the series of "HU's" are enigmatic in the extreme, for they are not anchored to anything in the narrative. It is impossible, in other words, to identify that image or word in the Hindi text which triggered their sudden remembrance. They seem unrooted in any context from which they arise, or to which they refer. There is, however, a certain justice in their remaining enigmas, for by so doing they remind us of the impossibility of piecing together the entire skeleton of Muḥammad Shākir's readerly imagination given the few fragments of intertextual associations he bequeathed us on the margins of his manuscript. A mind, especially one as lively and erudite as Muḥammad Shākir's, may range quickly over vast spaces, and it is presumptuous to think that we can accompany Shākir on all of his imaginative forays despite the vast distance which separates us. I am tempted, thus, to leave the last scribbles the enigmas they are.

But, if instead of searching for an immediate textual trigger we see these last macaronic scribbles as a retrospective glance on the entire manuscript, on the entire process of reading, copying, mulling over and translating a Hindi love poem, then perhaps the last page does reveal something of its purpose. The hadīs, at least, betray a pattern—in addition to being non-canonical, they all three all tiptoe around a central problem: the permissibility of music and dance for a Muslim. They all deal, therefore, with the category of 'tarab', which may translate specifically as 'music', or also more generally as 'levity'.
In the topmost register of the last page Shākir writes the following Persian quatrain in very fine letters:

The descendants of the prophet are great,
The mention of their essence is glorious
The prophet’s the son, and ‘Alī the love of his heart
O heart, look not upon their deeds with foolish eyes
For complainers belong to God, but the pious belong to me.

In the horizontal register below this Shākir writes a hadīṣ in Arabic:

"Muḥammad said, and may peace be upon him: 'When the Ṣūfi dances (raqṣ) the devil enters his fingers from behind so that he jumps to the right'."

In a vertical register along the side of the top half of the page Shākir writes yet another hadīṣ: “I have nothing to do with music (tarab)”. And finally, written obliquely across the top of the page at a slant is the very opposite sentiment about dance and music: “Singing is food (ḡaẓā) for the soul (rūḥ)”. The only other Arabic on the page is the scattered design of the mystical syllable "HU".

The debate on the permissibility of singing religious verse enjoyed, of course, a venerable history in Islamic cultures. It had a particularly vigorous presence in Indian Islam, where the Chishfī order of Ṣūfis specialized in the formalized ritual of singing religious verse (Samʻ) in the presence of a master. Since such ritualized singing, or Samʻ, was the very cornerstone of the Chishfī identity, their opponents predictably seized upon it as a point of criticism and comparison.11 But why, suddenly, should authoritative quotes on singing and

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11 The literature on this controversy with respect to the Chishfīs is considerable. See, for example, Bruce Lawrence, “The Early Chishfī Approach to Samʻ,” in Sacred Sound: Music
music be assembled by a reader completing the translation of a text that is neither about music nor dance? And why, for that matter, should the quotes support completely opposing views on music? While the second and third quotes frown upon music and dance, the third gives them a ringing endorsement, going so far as to declare singing 'food for the soul'.

The key, I believe, lies in Shaikh Burhanuddin Rabbani's spirited defence of the performance of the Hindi Candayana as reported by 'Abd al-Qadir Badayuni, and discussed earlier in this dissertation. According to Badayuni, Shaikh Rabbani of Delhi used to greatly enjoy hearing the Hindi Candayana sung by professional singers gifted with rich voices. When certain other Shaikhs of the city of Delhi questioned him about the propriety of thus indulging himself by hearing a masnavi in Hindavi, he retorted that those who have the capacity to taste the divine presence (ahl-i zauq) would not interpret the singing of the Hindi Candayana as mere frivolity, but, rather, as the occasion for the 'softening' of the sensitive heart—for not only did the Hindi tale incline the heart to ecstasy, it was also in conformity with certain Quranic passages. The word 'tarab', which appears in the enigmatic hadīs left by Muhammad Shākir, carries several meanings. 'Music' is certainly one of its meanings, but it may also mean generally any levity, enjoyment, or amusement, the Arabic root 'TRB' meaning variously: 'to be moved', 'to be delighted', 'to sing', 'to enrapture' and 'to please'.

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Could it be that in quoting hadīs on the issue of the general category of tarab (entertainment) Muḥammad Shākir was anticipating and defusing some such critique of his involvement with Hindi love poetry, a critique which would, predictably, classify the enjoyment of Hindi love poetry as mere 'tarab'? If so, then Shākir’s scribbles constitute a very calculated defence, for by quoting hadīs he certainly establishes his orthodox credentials as a Muslim. Furthermore, by quoting hadīs inimical to both music and dance he shows that he is well aware of the problematic nature of mere love poetry, which is tarab to the extent that it is entertaining. But after establishing all of this, Shākir leaves the potential critic with the last hadīs where The Prophet Muḥammad declares singing to be food for the soul. If my\textsuperscript{13} reading of the context and purpose of the enigmatic hadīs is correct then for Muḥammad Shākir the Hindi verse in the manuscript was just as problematic as mere entertainment for a pious Muslim. But it was also as irresistible and nourishing as good music.

\textsuperscript{13}I am indebted to Carl Ernst for suggesting this sensitive reading of the use of hadīs in the last pages of the manuscript.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Intriguing as Jayasi’s Hindi Padmāvat is in its complexity, it becomes even more so when we read it through the eyes of a Mughal reader like Muḥammad Shākir. For with the help of his remarkable memory the Hindi text is enlivened by a host of other presences—his own short Persian ditties, the couplets of Hāfiz, Quranic fragments, and even a ḥadīṣ or two. The challenge for a cultural historian (or any sensitive reader) is to follow the text through these vagaries. For this is not only where the text ‘lives,’ but also where the pleasure of reading lies.

In this thesis I have tried to show why historians of Mughal literature have been either unable to or disinterested in entering the varied terrain which is Muḥammad Shākir’s imagination, and therefore the ‘habitat’ of a work like Jayasi’s Padmāvat. The principal deterrent to our entry into this mental landscape is our insistence on viewing Mughal social and cultural history as an outcome of a natural and persistent confrontation between Hindus and Muslims. Once we grant this basic antagonism of Hindu and
Muslim as the foundation of Mughal culture, other polarities fall into place under the two rubrics. Thus, for example, in the field of language this polarity is held to express itself in the mutually exclusive lives of Persian-Urdu and Sanskritized Hindi. It is thus that when examining Jayasi's *Padmāvat* critics have not even entertained the possibility that a Hindi text could live much of its life in the imagination of a Persianized reader.

In this thesis I have presented a profile of the process by which an Indic theme and an Indic language were actively engaged by a Persianized sensibility. I have tried to sketch this process without invoking the paradigm of Hindu-Muslim antagonism (or its reverse—the insistence that there were no tensions between the two), since the paradigm is not only inflexible, but also anachronistic in projecting colonial and contemporary communal tensions into pre-modernity. It is, furthermore, a paradigm that isliterarily crude, for it traces a direct line of expression from possible political tensions to literary works.

One way of presenting the Mughal literary imagination according to its own terms and tensions is to focus on the responses of Persianized Mughals to those cultural situations where they confronted the most conspicuous, even dramatic, elements of an Indic imagination. Situations, for example, like Mirzā Mazhar Jān i Jānān being asked to interpret a dream of burning Hindu Gods, or Rāzi using the legally problematic (according to *shari‘ah*) practice of *safi* to weave a romantic poem within the conventions of both Persian lyric poetry and Sufi theology, or Burhānuddīn Rāz i-Ilāhī
departing from his usual practice of writing prose treatises in Arabic or Persian to compose a lyric poem in Hindi.

When we focus on Hindi in Mughal India we see that far from being used as a convenient tool for communicating with and converting the common Hindus, it was used by elite Mughals in communicating to other elites those issues which they felt could best be expressed in Hindi, and not in Persian or Arabic. Whether Hindu or Muslim, these elites certainly perceived Hindi as being rough, unschooled and rustic, but it is precisely this 'negative' judgement that rendered Hindi the most effective medium for conveying sentiments and scenarios about women's experience. And it was this same unschooled informality that also made Hindi an effective tool for representing those moments of spontaneous insight which Sufis felt could not be captured in Persian with its unmistakable associations of formal eduction and literary artifice. At such moments in its ecology Hindi stood positively valorized as the language most intimately associated with gnosis (ma'rifah) and esoteric knowledge (haqīqat), rather than merely with analytic knowledge ('ilm).

In Mughal India this preference for either Hindi or Persian had relatively little to do with religious identity. It is thus that we see a Hindu poet like Anand Rām Mukhlīs speaking just as enthusiastically about Persian as any Mughal Muslim. It was their degree of Persianization and urbanization, rather than simply their religious affiliation, that made Mughal elite poets assume a particular esthetic stance towards language. But the stance they assumed was not stable, but varied with the context for which
they wrote. For the cultural historian, then, it is important to grasp that the Mughal elite response to language varied with the esthetic (and not merely practical) effects that were sought from it. The clearest clue (though not the only one) to a desired esthetic aim, of course, is the literary genre, for generic conventions permitted certain effects, thus encouraging one language (or register of language) over another. We have seen the clearest example of this in the work of Muḥammad Rāfī‘ Sādā--in his predilection for a Sanskrit-derived tadbhava vocabulary in those elegies were the women lament their fate.

Similarly, when Persianized Mughals encountered Indic themes they responded in various ways, some of which may seem counter-intuitive to us. If we proceed from the assumption of a basic unbridgeable ideological cleavage between Hindus and Muslims then, of course, we would expect Mughal elites to shrink from Indic themes, as Ibn Baṭṭūṭā did from safi, or to simplify Indic elements, as Muḥammad Shākir did when he glossed ‘avatāra’ as a ‘live thing.’ Or we might expect an even more extreme response to an Indic element from a Muslim elite--such as when Muhammad Shākir interpreted Mount Kailāsh as Mount Sinai, thereby Islamicizing an Indic element beyond recognition.

These responses show moments when Persianized Muslims grappled with an Indic theme, found it either esthetically unpleasant, or ideologically indefensible, and thus transformed it according to the logic of either Persianate esthetics or Muslim theology. But they do not exhaust the range of Persianate responses to Indic themes.
Rāzī's response to safi, for example, is certainly an estheticization of an Indic practice within the conventional logic of the Persian lyric (safi as soz, or passionate ardor), but it does not 'efface' safi as Muḥammad Shākir did when he translated 'avatāra' as 'live thing.' Instead, Rāzī used safi as a metaphor for both the desirable death of the ego (fanā), and the Islamic principle of the unity of all being (tauḥīd). And he simultaneously used safi to draw a comparative moral geography in which the land of safi is revalorized as the land where passionate love ('ishq) finds its highest and most literal expression. In this comparative geography the expected hierarchies are overturned, and India emerges as pre-eminent over other Islamicate landscapes, not despite the practice of safi, but precisely because of it. Rāzī's reformulation of sati in Shamʿ o Parvānah provides us with a profile of Mughal imagination that is complex and subtle.

This, I wold argue, is where we should begin constructing a Mughal cultural history—with the realization that while the elite Mughal imagination was both heavily Persianized and Islamicized, it was also acutely aware and proud of its Indic roots. This awareness led to a creative engagement with Indic languages and Indic themes, and their simultaneous combination with Persian and Islamic themes. The result was not just uniquely Indian, but also bracingly complex.
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