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The Rustic Beloved:
Ecology of Hindi in a Persianate World

I

Tʜᴇ issue central to this essay is defined by a three-way relationship—that between literary and religious identity, and the varying emotional resonances of languages and dialects in the élite culture of Mughal India.

Having raised the issue in the abstract let us visit a specific historical moment that captures the questions most vividly. In the spring of 1739 a small group of Mughal noblemen traveled to the outskirts of Delhi and set up camp for an extended stay at the bustling fairgrounds surrounding the tomb of a Saint. The fair was gathered around the tomb of a Sufi Saint whose death anniversary (*'urs*) was being celebrated with great fanfare. The Mughal friends were, therefore, more than just spectators at a fair; they were, simultaneously, pilgrims. And one among these pilgrims to a Sufi's tomb was a Hindu nobleman by the name of Anand Ram.[1] As was the custom among Mughal literati Anand Ram composed poetry—not in his native Panjabi, but in Persian. And to signal his

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[1]For a Mughal biography of Anand Ram, see Bindraban Das Khushgo, *Safīna-e Khushgō*, ed. Saiyid Shāh Muḥammad 'Aṯāu 'r-Raḥmān 'Aṯā (Patna: Idāra-e Taḥqīqāt-e 'Arabī-o-Fārsī, 1959). For a discussion of Mukhliṣ's *Safar-nāma*, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Discovering the Familiar: Notes on the Travel Account of Anand Ram Mukhlis," *South Asia Research* 16.2 (1996). For an edition of the *Safar-nāma*, see Saiyid Aẕhar 'Alī, ed. *Safar-nāma-e Mukhliṣ* (Rampur: Hindustan Press, 1946). For a short biographical sketch and his other works, see C.A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey* (London: Luzac & Co., 1953), vol. 1, pt. 2, pp. 612–4, and vol. 2, pp. 1319–20. See also Jamīl Jālibī, *Tārīkh-e Adab-e Urdū*, 3rd ed. (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqī-e Adab, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 194–8.

Persian poetic persona Anand Ram had taken the Persian pen name (*takhalluṣ*) of Mukhliṣ, "the sincere"—sincere, that is, as a lover. On this occasion Mukhliṣ was in the company of several Persian-speaking Muslim noblemen, chief among whom was the great lexicographer and grammarian Sirāju ʾd-Dīn Khān Ārzū. On his first night at the fair Mukhliṣ was troubled by insomnia, and so he asked his servant to tell him a story that he might be lulled to sleep.

The tale his servant told Mukhliṣ was very well known. It had been written in 1542 in a dialect of Hindi by Muḥammad Jāyasī, a provincial Sufi belonging to the successful Chishti order, and it told of the tragic love affair between a North Indian prince and a Sri Lankan princess called Padmāvatī, or "She Who is Born of the Lotus." The narrative of *Padmāvat* is one of the most celebrated romances in the canon of Hindi literature. What detains us in this sleepless night at the fairgrounds is not the content of *Padmāvat*, but rather Mukhliṣ's reaction to its language. As the servant narrated the tale in the broad Eastern dialect in which it had been composed by Jāyasī, Mukhliṣ was entranced. And here is what he said:

> [M]y servant told the colorful tale that Jāyasī, author of the Hindi *Padmāvat*, had written entirely in the Eastern dialect—as though it were an *Eastern melody brimming over with pain*. 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 (*qalamkār-e Fārsī*) then it is possible that this work of art might appear elegant and permissible in the estimation of the people of taste (*dar naẓar-e ahl-e żauq īn fan mustaḥsan numāyad*). Therefore, my pen laid the foundations of this literary project and, having completed it within the span of a week, called it *Hangāma-e ʿIshq* (the clamor of love)."[2]

For his retelling Mukhliṣ chose a sartorial metaphor. Through a synecdochic association, he transformed Jāyasī's Hindi tale into its central character, Princess Padmāvatī. But the transformation raised a dilemma—how was this Hindi-beloved-in-the-rough to be presented to people of literary refinement—such as Mukhliṣ's circle of companions? For her presentation to these refined friends—by implication her

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[2]Ānand Rām Mukhliṣ, *Hangāma-e ʿIshq*, compiled 1739 (Patna: Khuda-bakhsh Library, ms. #8918, folio 5).

lovers—the Hindi-beloved was deemed in need of a change of clothes, which were fashioned by Mukhliṣ when he recast in Persian finery the beloved he felt to be unpresentable in her coarse Hindi garb. Here Hindi is defined by opposition: if Persian robes refined the Hindi-beloved, making her fit for the eyes of the literati, then Hindi by implication lacked polish, elegance and taste.

But that is not the end of the matter, for lurking in Mukhliṣ's account we also sense a complimentary attitude towards Hindi—and especially towards its Eastern dialect, which he highlights for comment. While on the one hand Mukhliṣ felt the Hindi-beloved to be in need of a change of clothes, on the other he found her to be especially effective in moving the emotions. In his imprecise definition of "an Eastern dialect" Mukhliṣ's is the distanced view of an urbane Panjabi peering east from the cosmopolis of Delhi. But imprecise though he was about the tale's provenance, Mukhliṣ felt the unmistakable pull of its language upon his sensibility—it moved him, as does a soulful melody "brimming over with pain" *(sar tā sar čun parda'-e pūrabī labrēz-e dard)*. The Eastern dialect of Hindi evidently evoked associations of musicality, rhythm and cadence. In the exacting standards of a Mughal nobleman the Hindi *Padmāvat* may have lacked polish, but she was especially effective in moving the heart to feel the ennobling emotion of pain, without which, in Sufi psychology, man remains *merely* a man.

This anecdote ushers in a host of questions which begin to smudge the clear outlines of a conventional picture. The tale of *Padmāvat* which Mukhliṣ heard recited is recognized as a central, foundational text of the Hindi literary canon. And yet, here we glimpse it at a threshold—as it is about to enter Persian. Nor was this the first time such a transposition had been attempted. In 1739, when Mukhliṣ sat sleepless in Delhi, there already existed three major Persian retellings of the Hindi *Padmāvat*, one Bengali transposition, and in just a few decades there were to be countless retellings in Urdu.[3]

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[3]For a catalogue of the Persian versions of this narrative, see Saiyid Amir Hasan Abidi, "The Story of Padmavat in Indo-Persian Literature," *Indo-Iranica* 15 (1962), pp. 1–11. Abidi 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 "retelling." For a Persian retelling of Jāyasī's Hindi *Padmāvat*, see Bazmī's *Rat o Padam* composed for Emperor Jahangir in 1619 C.E. See 'Abdu 'sh-Shukūr Bazmī, *Dāstān-e Padmāvat,*

But even if we confine our gaze to Jāyasī's Hindi *Padmāvat*, its status as a property of the Hindi literary canon appears somewhat shakier *if* we begin to focus on the history of its readership. For example, the earliest surviving manuscript of Jāyasī's *Padmāvat*, copied in the year 1674, was written with an interlinear Persian translation.[4] Its owner and scribe, a Sufi by the name of Muḥammad Shākir, was clearly more comfortable in Persian—to the extent that he laboriously added diacritics on every Hindi word to show the short vowels without which he could not pronounce the Hindi he wrote in Arabic script.

Muḥammad Shākir, however, did something else which gives us a rare glimpse into the very stuff of his literary imagination. As he copied the Hindi poem and scribbled its literal Persian translation in the lines between, it sparked in his memory couplets from the Persian *ghazals* of Ḥāfiẓ. And these Muḥammad Shākir left inscribed on the margins.[5] For example, at a turn in the narrative where Prince Ratnasena hears of the beauty of Princess Padmāvatī, and is instantly smitten by her, Muḥammad Shākir inserts the famous opening couplet of Ḥāfiẓ's *dīvān* in which the poet warns: "Love appeared at first a cinch, until the problems came" (*ki 'ishq āsān namūd avval valē uftād mushkil-hā*). King Ratnasena stands warned, therefore, in the hallowed words of Ḥāfiẓ. Through the learned medium of Shākir's imagination Ḥāfiẓ spoke to Jāyasī, bridging the two centuries that separated them. In Shākir's reading Hindi and Persian are locked in so tight an embrace that it is only through a great insensitivity that we can pry them apart. A reader such as Muḥammad Shākir presents us with a challenge: to train our own imagination to recognize those fleeting Persian resonances which added depth to what he copied in Hindi. To rise to this challenge is to train our ears to hear both Jāyasī and Ḥāfiẓ, as also Hindi and Persian—for it is in this simultaneous presence of two authors and two languages that we may rediscover the delight which compelled Muḥammad Shākir to persist in the tedium of adding diacritics

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ed. Amīr Ḥasan 'Ābidī (Tehran: Bunyād-e Farhaṅg-e Īrān, 1971). For an Urdu retelling, see Mīr Ẕiyāu 'd-Dīn Ishrat and Ghulām 'Alī 'Ibrat Barēlvī, ed. Khvāja Quṭbu 'd-Dīn Aḥmad, *Padmāvat: Taṣnīf-e Dō Shā'ir* (Lucknow, Nāmī Press, 1796). Munshi Naval Kishore's press in Lucknow published many editions in "*bhakha*" which, in our terminology is Urdu. See also Muḥammad 'Abdu 'l-Vaḥīd Ghafaru 'l-Lāh, trans., *Padmāvat: Bhakha Mutarjim* (Kanpur: Maṭba'-e Niẓāmī, 1323/1905).

[4]Muḥammad Shākir Amrōhavī, *Padmāvat* (Rampur: Rampur Raza Library, ms. #1).

[5]Folio 31b.

to every Hindi word in the three-hundred odd pages of the 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. Is it not telling, then, that in the considerable critical literature on *Padmāvat* there is no mention at all of Persian, even though almost everyone who has worked on *Padmāvat* has consulted this celebrated early manuscript?[6]

I cite this example to point out what seems to me a pervasive and largely unexamined assumption of monolingualism in the study of premodern Indian literature. By this I mean more than just the assumption that medieval authors and readers functioned primarily in one language. One significant corollary of the monolingual assumption is the facile equation we draw between literary traditions and religious communities. Thus, *Padmāvat* comes to be situated exclusively and neatly within the confines of Hindi written in Nagari script. But such neat correspondences fail to explain the social world of such Mughals as Mukhliṣ and Shākir. Where, for example, do we begin to locate the identity of Mukhliṣ—a Panjabi Hindu making a pilgrimage to the tomb of a Sufi saint, enjoying a sophisticated narrative in Eastern Hindi and retelling it in high Persian for the delectation of his Persian- and Urdu-speaking Muslim colleagues?

To do justice to such a complex and adamantly heteroglot literary community one must, I believe, redirect one's 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 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,

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[6]Vasudeva Sarana Agrawala, 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. See Vasudeva Sarana Agrawala, ed. *Padmavat: Malik Muhammad Jayasi Krta Mahakavya, Mula aura Sanjivani Vyakhya* (Jhansi: Sahitya Sadan, 1955), p. 18.

positively discouraged.

The élite, urban Mughal community was overwhelmingly Persianate and Islamicate in its tastes. It valued Persian as the primary language of literary and political discourse; and yet a number of élite and Persian-speaking Mughal authors like Muḥammad Jāyasī and Muḥammad Shākir specifically chose to compose or read either exclusively in Hindi, or in a mixture of Persian and Hindi. How do we account for these multilingual choices? Can we penetrate the intellectual universe of élite Mughal authors to define that range of aesthetic considerations which sometimes made Hindi seem attractive to them, even though they simultaneously held it to be lacking in refinement? What shades of meaning and emotion were thrown into higher relief by such anomalous linguistic choices, and how did élite Mughals themselves comment on the choice to write in Hindi? I will attempt to address this cluster of questions with the specific example of a number of Mughal texts. The first and longest part of the discussion will center around *Bikaṭ Kahānī* (the great tale).[7] *Bikaṭ Kahānī* was composed in 1636 by Muḥammad Afẓal, a teacher and scholar of Persian in the North Indian town of Panipat. I have chosen *Bikaṭ Kahānī* to explore these questions for a number of reasons, the foremost of which is that Afẓal composed it in a hybrid of Hindi and Persian, and thus located it at the periphery of both literary traditions.

II

The élite Mughal authors who chose to write in Hindi were overwhelmingly Sufi in their religious affiliations, and this has led contemporary scholars like ‘Abdu ’l-Ḥaq[8] and Richard Eaton[9] to speculate that Hindi

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[7]For critical editions, see *Afẓal kā Bārahmāsa Maʿ Sharḥ*, ed. Akhlāq Ḥusain ‘Ārif (Lucknow: Niẓāmī Press, 1989); *Bikaṭ Kahānī*, ed. Nūru ’l-Ḥasan Hāshmī and Masʿūd Ḥusain Khān (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy, 1979). All references are to Hāshmī’s edition.

[8]See his *Urdū kī Ibtidā’ī Nashv-o-numā mēṅ Ṣūfiyā-e Kirām kā Kām* (Aligarh: Anjuman-e Taraqqī-e Urdū, Hind, 1968), pp. 6–8.

[9]The following is my summation of Eaton’s study of the Sufis of Bijapur and his explanation of their use of Hindi or Hindavi. See “Sufis as Literati,” in *The Sufis of Bijapur: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 135–74. A simpler version of Eaton’s arguments appeared in his earlier article, “Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam,” in *History of Religions* 14.2 (1974), pp. 117–27.

Sufi literature was overwhelmingly a literature of conversion, written by élite, Persian-speaking Sufi authors for outreach to the rural Hindus. Being unschooled in Persian or Arabic, the rural Hindu masses could only be drawn into the Muslim community through the use of Indian vernaculars. In his study of the Sufis of Bijapur, Eaton notes that the Bijapur prose compositions, which mostly dealt with abstruse theological issues, were most likely aimed at the inner circle of disciples and were necessarily in Persian since the Sufi technical vocabulary is derived from either Persian or Arabic. The Hindi compositions were, by contrast, simple lyrics through which the élite Sufis could communicate with illiterate Hindus. Viewed thus, Hindi poetry is an élite concession to the simple sensibility of rural, Hindi-speaking Hindus. It was a literature which—in Eaton and 'Abdu 'l-Ḥaq's explanations—was demotic in its orientation and because of this it was a perfect medium for the gradual conversions of Hindus.[10]

Do élite Muslim aspirations to create a demotic vernacular verse in service of conversion explain a text like *Bikaṭ Kahānī*? To answer this we must first recognize the contours of the literary niche into which *Bikaṭ Kahānī* fits. Afẓal's poem belongs to a well-known genre of pre-modern North Indian poetry called *Bārahmāsa*, or the "Twelve-month Cycle."[11] The *Bārahmāsa* 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 *Bārahmāsa* derives, however, from two peculiarities. The suffering lover of the *Bārahmāsa*, called the *nāyika*, is unambiguously a woman grieving for an unmistakably male lover—sometimes even her husband. In her laments the *nāyika* typically addresses her female companions, and sometimes even older female rela-

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[10]Since the publication of *The Sufis of Bijapur* in 1978 Eaton has revised his own explanation of Hindi-as-an-instrument-of-conversion (personal communication, October 1997). Readers personally familiar with Eaton will know this. However, the revision has not been made publicly or academically. Thus, the explanation remains firmly lodged as a paradigm for understanding the Sufi use of Hindi even while its author questions it. More importantly, however, no *new* explanations for the use of Hindi by the otherwise Persian-speaking Mughal literati have been put forward. It is thus that I am raising this issue again after a hiatus of some thirty years.

[11]On the generic tradition of the *Bārahmāsa*, see Charlotte Vaudeville *Barahmasa in Indian Literatures: Songs of the Twelve Months in Indo-Aryan Literatures* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1986).

tives. By contrast the Persian and Urdu *ghazal* is at pains to leave the gender of both the lover and the beloved unspecified. The world of the *ghazal* is, furthermore, adamantly non-domestic. Mothers, sisters and women friends don't intrude upon the lamenting lover. Secondly, the *Bārahmāsa* unfolds the sentiments of the female lover against the detailed background of changing seasons; thus, the changes in the natural world—such as changing foliage, or the migrations of birds—evoke different memories and sorrows in the lover. The *Bārahmāsa* has a sorrow for every season. That the emotions are governed by the changing seasons is stressed by the very structure of the *Bārahmāsa* 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. A further difference is that the rhythm of the *Bārahmāsa* is modulated specifically to the Indian landscape, with much being made of the monsoons—the traditional time when the rains made the roads impassable and martial or mercantile Indians wound up the season to return home from either raiding or trading. The *Bārahmāsa* 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 *Bikaṭ Kahānī* Afẓal introduces us to the lover's sorrows during the month of *sāvan,* or July, when the monsoon is at its height, and thus the laments of the lonely *nāyika* presumably at their shrillest.

In all of this Afẓal conforms to the conventions of the genre of *Bārahmāsa*; where he differs quite markedly is in his use of language, for *Bikaṭ Kahānī* is not just in a dialect of Hindi. Afẓal's language ranges, instead, from pure Persian—such as when he quotes Persian verses from the poet ʿAbdu ʾr-Raḥmān Jāmī—to dialects of Western Hindi with a predominance of *tadbhava* words derived and modified from Sanskrit.[12] This

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[12]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, "*bikaṭ*" is a *tadbhava* word, being derived from the Sanskrit "*vikata,*" meaning, "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

range is already unusual for its two linguistic extremities, but it is the middle range of Afẓal'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 *nāyika* taunts those "warriors" who have never known the pain of separation:

> *Bavā'ī kī nahīṅ jis shakhṣ kō pīr*
> *Če dānad dard-e dīgar-rā, arē bīr*
> He who's never known the pangs of madness
> What does that warrior know of other pains?[13]

The English translation inevitably levels the macaronic texture of the couplet which alternates between such Hindi words as "*pir*" ("pain," derived from the Sanskrit "*pida*"), and "*bir*" ("warrior," derived from the Sanskrit "*vira*"). But in contrast to these *tadbhava* words what is one to make of the phrase "*če dānad dard-e dīgar-rā* ("what does he know of other pains")? The fragment is surprising in its use of not just Persian nouns, but even Persian verbs and case markers? It is above all through his use of Persian verbs and prepositions that Afẓal creates a linguistic texture so markedly different from that of the early Urdu of poets like Saudā, who did use a highly Persianized vocabulary of nouns and adjectives, but never Persian verbs. The use of Persian verbs, sentence fragments, and Persian quotes from Jāmī is all the more unusual when juxtaposed against the special forms of address which Afẓal uses from the stock vocabulary of a special female speech which Hindi-speaking men never use except to mimic women. Afẓal's *nāyika*, for example, frequently prefaces her laments with the vocative "*rī*" which is used exclusively by women when addressing other women of roughly the same age and social status. Thus, for example, the *nāyika* says:

> *Khirad gum-karda, majnūṅ hō rahī rī*
> Losing my wits (*this in pure Persian*), I became
>   a second Majnun.[14]

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register of speech or writing is "infused" with an unmodified Sanskrit vocabulary. In the case of North Indian literary texts the opposite of tadbhavization would be "Persianization" or "Arabicization," and, more recently, "Anglicization." For the cultural 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.

[13] *Bikaṭ Kahānī*, p. 33.

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 Afẓal chooses. His is not a uniform dialect of Hindi, but rather alternates between Braj and Khari Boli (two dialects of Western Hindi from the region around Delhi), with occasional words taken from the dialect of Southern Hindi. Afẓal 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; his effort seems calculated, 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 Afẓal'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 Hindi-Persian maca-ronic verse by élite Persianate Mughal authors. These texts are mostly unpublished and seldom discussed, for neither the Indian Hindi scholars nor the Indian Persian scholars claim them as the property of their literary canons. This is what I mean by the assumption of monolingualism. My current research on *Padmāvat* has revealed a number of such texts, the most well-known of which is a retelling of Jāyasī's *Padmāvat* by Rāzī, the governor of the city of Delhi and the deputy of Emperor Aurangzeb in the last years of his rule over the Mughal Empire. In his abridged version of the *Padmāvat* Rāzī inserts couplets from such famous Hindi poets as Surdas within the otherwise Persian body of his verse. Again, as with Afẓal, Rāzī's effort is to juxtapose discrete bits of Hindi and Persian rather than to blend their grammars and vocabularies in order to create a middle range of language like the Rekhta-Urdu of the early eighteenth century.

Now that we have noted the peculiarities of Mughal macaronic verse, the question remains why did élite, Mughal authors choose to write in Hindi when they clearly lived in a courtly subculture which valued Persian as the language of refined discourse, especially for the expression of lyric poetry.

Eaton's explanations offer us no signposts in our search, for they specifically address the motivations of missionary Sufis in writing Hindi; and *Bikaṭ Kahānī* is emphatically not a Sufi text. The Urdu critic Ḥāfiẓ

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Maḥmūd Shērānī suggests a possible approach.[15] By placing *Bikaṭ Kahānī* within a discussion of the development of Urdu in Panjab Shērānī locates its bilingualism within a teleology of Urdu. Placed in a venerable genealogy consisting of the Hindavi writings of Amīr Khusrō and Sharafud 'd-Dīn Manērī, Afẓal 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 *Bikaṭ 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 Shērānī through analogy with code-switching in modern North Indian—and especially Panjabi—speech where, says Shērānī, "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 Panjabi verb. Such a point is reached without any special effort or artifice (*ye ṣūrat baghair kisī khāṣ kōshish yā taṣannuʿ kē paidā hō gaʾī hai*)." But in Shērānī'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 Shērānī's view this is incipient Urdu such ungainliness is to be expected, especially when it comes from the Panjab.

For Shērānī 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 "macarronico" to name a kind of burlesque pioneered in the 1490's. Here is Teofilo da Folegno, one humanist who wrote such verse for parody, defining his practice in a treatise on macaronism:

> 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.[16]

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[15]For the following comments by Shērānī, see his *Maqālāt-e Ḥāfiẓ Maḥmud Shērānī*, ed. Maẓhar Maḥmūd Shērānī, 7 vols. (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqī-e Adab, 1966–1976), vol. 2, pp. 99–100. For a more positive appraisal of *Bikat Kahānī*, see Jālibī, vol. 1, pp. 62–9.

[16]Quoted in Ugo Enrico Paoli, *Il Latino Maccheronico* (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1959), p. 5. See also Siegfried Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons: Bilingualism*

For the refined Latinate tastes of Teofilo macaronic speech was just as low in the hierarchy of possible speeches as macaroni still is in our own culinary hierarchy of Italian pastas. And yet, gross as it was (or 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 *Bikaṭ 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 Afẓal. And it is also here that we have to admit to a blindness, for we cannot sit in the presence of seventeenth-century readers of *Bikaṭ Kahānī* to see whether or not a smile played upon their faces as they heard the *nāyika* grieve in both Hindi and Persian. Impossible to tell for sure, but it does seem to me that unlike the burlesque of Teofilo, Afẓal's intent was not to make the grieving *nāyika* the butt of satire or parody. The primary mood in *Bikaṭ Kahānī* is the pathos of separation, or *viraha*. The reader is not asked to laugh *at* but, rather, to cry *with* the *nāyika*.

I will address the issue of pathos, and particularly the kind of pathos that is enhanced by the use of Hindi, but for now let me voice one important disagreement with Shērānī by pointing out that *Bikaṭ 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 *taṣannu'* or artifice, and mannerism. Its heteroglot nature hasn't just come about, but has been constructed. If one is attentive to the literariness of *Bikaṭ Kahānī*, then one must ask how its macaronic texture was the result of aesthetic choices made by a competent and sensitive author trying to enhance the pathos of separation by the use of Hindi.

In a moment I will attempt an answer to these questions, but for now let us begin by recognizing that whatever Afẓal'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,

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and Preaching in Late-Medieval England (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

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 *Bikaṭ Kahānī* and Rāzī's *Padmāvat* are both texts written for the highly educated Persianized élite of Mughal India—whether they were Hindu or Muslim. In other words, we have to imagine an author like Afẓal or Rāzī inspired by something other than the virtuous ideal of communicating to the masses by writing in their vernacular. We have to imagine 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 *Bārahmāsa* and the *ghazal*—departures which make *Bikaṭ Kahānī* a memorable text. Such a reader would not have acquired Hindi or Persian merely to cope with the demands of living in a multilingual society, but would have been interested in mining this dual heritage to extend the expressive reach of both languages.

III

One expressive world which opens more fully to Afẓal through his use of Hindi is, I would argue, the world of feminine 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 *Bikaṭ Kahānī* Afẓal was tackling a genre which probed specifically feminine emotions, and which heightened the pathos of separation by positioning the confined woman within, gazing out at the expanse of changing nature which was denied her, but contained her lost, or worse yet, deceitful lover. The *Bārahmāsa* derived its emotional punch from the *un*equal 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 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 speech which is used only by Hindi-speaking women, Afẓal grounds *Bikaṭ Kahānī*

specifically and unambiguously within a female 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 *nāyika* in the intimate, feminine vocative "*rī.*" 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 a *Bārahmāsa*. Imagine, then, how much more intense the delight of eavesdropping for an élite, Mughal reader living in a society far more radically segregated by gender than is ours. This is the physical world of the *Bārahmāsa* without inhabiting which we cannot inhabit the emotions of the grieving *nāyika*.

The convention of using Hindi for women's speech was not peculiar to the *Persian*-writing Mughal literati, but continued into the eighteenth century, by when the same literati were writing increasingly in a heavily Persianized Urdu.[17] 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 Mughal élite; 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 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 Muḥammad Rafī' Saudā[18] (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 élite began using Urdu for literary purposes, but

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[17]For the most recent research on the history of the naming of this new vernacular, see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "Unprivileged Power: The Strange Case of Persian (and Urdu) in Nineteenth-Century India," in *The Annual of Urdu Studies* #13 (1998), pp. 10–11.

[18]For a traditional biography (*tażkira*) of Saudā, see Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, *Āb-e Ḥayāt* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Bashir and Sons, n.d.), pp. 141–60. See also Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, *Three Mughal Poets: Mir, Sauda, Mir Hasan.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 37–69.

the linguistic range of Saudā's verse is somewhat greater than that of later Urdu poets like Ghālib 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 élite literary culture of Mughal India.

Saudā was a prolific writer. His *Kullīyāt* (collected works) consists of two massive volumes arranged according to the various genres expected of an Urdu poet. One encounters, first, his biting satires (*hajv*) on which, above all, Saudā based his reputation; then follow the Urdu *ghazals*, the *maṣnavīs* (narrative lyric poems), and *marṣiyas*, elegies in honor of the martyrs of the battle of Karbala. Saudā's Persian *ghazals* constitute the smallest section, and finally bring the *Kullīyāt* 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 Żauq. And this flexibility becomes particularly apparent in Saudā's *marṣiyas*, where he ranges frequently into a Sanskrit-derived vocabulary of *tadbhava* words not as frequently encountered in his *ghazals* 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 *marṣiyas*, and the reader comes to expect them in the writing of not only Saudā, but even later *marṣiya* writers like Mīr Anīs and Dabīr. But occasionally Saudā composes *marṣiyas* in a register which even for his corpus of *marṣiyas* is unusual in its density of *tadbhava* words; and in these *marṣiyas* 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, Dakhani, and, in one instance, even Panjabi.[19]

Saudā's *marṣiyas* provoke two questions about the aesthetic and emo-

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[19]For Saudā's Urdu and Persian *ghazals*, *mukhammasāts* and satires, see his *Kullīyāt-e Saudā*, vol 1, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan (New Delhi: Taraqqī-e Urdū Bureau, 1985); for his *marṣiyas*, vol. 2, editor unnamed (Allahabad: Ram Narayan Lal Beni Madho, 1971); for the Panjabi *marṣiya*, vol. 2, p. 363; for a very self-consciously Dakhani (Deccani) use of language by Saudā, vol. 2, p. 432; and for a macaronic Urdu-Persian usage, the *marṣiya* in *musaddas* (sextet), vol. 2, p. 376.

tional resonance of Hindi in its Persianate environment. First, why is it especially in the genre of the Urdu *mars̤iya* that we see the greatest departures from a Persianized vocabulary, and second, why, within this field of relatively un-Persianized vocabulary, do certain *mars̤iyas* stand out even more in their use of *tadbhava* words?

One such *mars̤iya* 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: Fāt̤ima, the mother of Ḥusain; Zainab, his sister; and Sakīna, his young daughter. As they are all led in chains through the burning desert to the Caliph's palace in Damascus, we encounter Fāt̤ima, grieving her dead son:

> *Kāsē kahiyē bāt kaun man sun kē būjʰē*
> *Rōvat hūṅ din rāt Ḥusainā ran mēṅ jūjʰē*
> *Nainan barsat nirkʰat, umagat hai čʰātī*
> *Pyāsē mārē hāʾe nabī kē aisē nātī*
> *Gērū sē kapṛē raṅgē mukʰ par malē bʰabʰūt*
> *Pūčʰēṅ bībī Fāt̤ima "kit gaiyō mērō pūt?"*
> 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 Bībī Fāt̤ima, "Where's
>   my son gone?"[20]

We may well shy away from the politically thorny issue of labeling Fāt̤ima's speech, for the choices are many, and bewildering: is it Urdu or proto-Urdu, Hindi or Hindavi? Or is it, instead, simply the dialect of Braj? The debate about the precise nomenclature and classification of Hindi, Urdu and the various types of Hindi has long exercised us. It is a debate which I deliberately want to avoid, since answers to it are dependent on one's ambitions in forging either long or short genealogies for contemporary speech. It is a debate which ultimately tells us far more about the politics of contemporary South Asian language communities

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[20] *Kulliyāt*, vol. 2, pp. 524–7.

than it does about pre-modern social realities. I would, in fact, go so far as to claim that the debate over Hindi or Urdu is largely a distraction which keeps us from the more pertinent issue of discussing the aesthetics and politics of pre-modern literary creations, *whatever* their 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 *marṣiya* clearly as being "*zabān-e Purabī-āmēz*" ("mixed with the Eastern dialect").

Whatever the linguistic label we choose to give Fāṭima's lament, one point is undeniable—it abounds in Sanskrit-derived words like "*pūt*" "*nain*" and "*mukh*" which are anomalous in Saudā's largely Persianized register of speech. Both the narrator's speech and that of the women in this elegy lack the Perso-Arabic vocabulary which Saudā uses extensively in his *ghazals* as well as other *marṣiyas*. Furthermore, in his use of forms like "*gaiyō*" and "*kit*" (instead of *gayā* and *kahāṅ*) Fāṭima departs entirely from the standard Urdu-Khari Boli grammar normally used by Saudā as well as most non-Deccani Urdu poets.[21] The tone of Fāṭima's speech is certainly less polished because of her avoidance of Persian and her use of a regional Hindi dialect. It is overwhelmingly as a result of this, I would argue, that her lament is laced with an informal, familial affection—a tone established immediately in the opening line by Fāṭima's transformation of "Ḥusain" into "Ḥusain*ā*" through the addition of the diminutive suffix "*ā*." Fāṭima 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 Karbala.

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 *kūča* (alley), the *bāzār*, the *čaman* (garden), the *dasht* (wilderness), and the *bazm* (soiree).

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[21]Deccani Urdu *ghazal*-poets like Qulī Quṭb 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.

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 bazaar, 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 behavior; 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 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 élite house, the living room. The *ghazal* maintains a scrupulous distance from the home and locates its sorrows in non-domestic spaces.[22] 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 willful cruelty. In the emotional logic of the *ghazal* the home and the family are not only a distraction, they are a dissonance.

The *marṡiya*, 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 *marṡiya* 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 *marṡiya*. The laments of the male characters in a *marṡiya* often come from the battlefield; but the women grieve from the seclusion of the tents pitched outside the battlefield of Karbala. 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 final battle—an occasion for which the

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[22]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*: *Maiṅ vahāṅ pahuṅčā tō un-kī gāliyōṅ kā kyā javāb / Yād tʰīṅ jitnī du'ā'eṅ ṣarf-e darbāṅ hō ga'īṅ* (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 doorkeeper).

groom's body arrives riding on a bier. An exception to these "indoor laments" are the laments we read in this *marṣiya* 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 is precisely the pathos of the *marṣiya*—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 *marṣiya* locates itself in the specificity of gender, family relationships, and domestic settings. The emotions it exploits are often quite unambiguously women's emotions. And the speech which corresponds to an outpouring of such emotions is pointedly un-Persianized.[23] The emotional texture and physical location of Saudā's *marṣiya* is much closer to the *Bārahmāsa* where the laments also unfold within the walls of a home and in the company of other women. Thus, even though the verses of *Bikaṭ Kahānī* and the *marṣiyas* of Saudā are conventionally claimed as the literary "property" of two different—and often mutually antagonistic—communities, I would argue that they are rooted in the soil of a very similar aesthetic logic. Is there a coincidence, then, between women's speech, domestic settings and the use of Hindi in certain genres of Mughal poetry? If so, what is the relation of this literary

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[23]The vernacularized nature of the *marṣiya*, 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 *marsiya* 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 *marṣiya*-writer seeks, above all, to create a tearjerker which will reduce the assembled Shī'a *majlis* to communal and cathartic weeping: "[M]*arsiyas* are written to be read before an audience in a *majlis*, and to make the listeners cry. To succeed in its chief goal a *marsiya* 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 *marṣiya* aims quite specifically for a creation of feminine sentiments and losses and that this specifically gendered set of emotions is best expressed in an unschooled vernacular speech, largely because this is what the élite Mughal women (and especially domestic women, as opposed to *ṭavā'ifs*) would have spoken. I also differ from Naim in drawing connections between the genre of the *marṣiya* and other "feminine-speech" genres, like *Bikaṭ Kahānī* by Muḥammad Afẓal.

choice to the empirical reality of Mughal culture?

IV

The élite 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 women and men to speak at different registers of a common language—and sometimes entirely *different* languages altogether. We know very little of what Mughal élite women spoke either with their men or among themselves; but we do know that despite a constant trickle of immigration from Central Asia, Persian was not a mother-tongue for the bulk of Mughal élites; it was acquired, instead, through formal education with an *ustād* (teacher, mentor). Formal education was largely the privilege of men, since it required the student to attend school outside the home, and élite women were expected to observe *parda*. It is easy, then, to imagine the gendered quality of élite Mughal speech—with educated men displaying their virtuosity by speaking, and especially writing, Persian—and later an elaborately Persianized Urdu—while women talked in a variety of unstandardized dialects with a minimum of Persian. The "*Bēgamātī Zabān*" or "Women's Jargon" which late nineteenth-century Muslim reformers like Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Tʰānvī sought to chasten was overwhelmingly a colloquial speech lacking in flowery Persian or Arabic. What little Persian or Arabic the *Bēgamātī Zabān* did have was pronounced—or according to Tʰānvī "*mis*pronounced"—with the Persian "*z's*" changing to "*j's*" and the "*khʾs*" to "*kʰʾs*." It is precisely this change of pronunciation in Persian words that is also evident in those passages of Afẓal's poem where the *nāyika* speaks in Hindi. But unlike the *bēgams* who spoke the *Bēgamātī Zabān*, Afẓal's *nāyika* surprises us by breaking out in chaste Persian and, in one instance, even Arabic.

"*Bēgamātī Zabān*" is a technical term usually reserved for nineteenth-century women's Urdu with its unique stock of curse words, diminutives and terms of endearment;[24] however, since the peculiar social conditions which produced a distinct women's jargon were not unique to the nineteenth century, I would assert that a similar gender-based cleavage also

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[24]See Gail Minault, "Begamati Zuban: Women's Language and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Delhi," *India International Center Quarterly*, 11.2 (1984), pp. 155–70.

existed in the two prior centuries of Mughal culture, with women speaking a medley of unstandardized, and usually unnamed, local dialects with the thinnest veneer of Persian. In our contemporary jargon we might group such dialects within the rubric of "Hindi"—though not 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 Lakʰnau, the two centers of Persianate culture—spoke a language less Persianized. For a Mughal intellectual like Saudā, Afżal's incursion into Hindi might well have connoted "popular" speech, but for him its demotic nature would not have consisted in its orientation towards the rural, non-Persianized, Hindu masses, but, rather, in its vivid evocation of a rustic and unschooled women's dialect which all Mughal élites heard at home in the women's quarter. While savoring the rusticity of un-Persianized speech in writing its highly-educated, Persianized, male readers would have been under no illusions regarding whom this literature was intended for. Neither Afżal, nor Rāzī, nor 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 and informal speech that he himself never wrote, and may not even have spoken in the public arena with his colleagues, fellow-poets and Sufi masters.

The conception of the vernacular as the voice of "the people" or in the service of "the people" is perhaps best viewed as a trope that captures the social ideals of the founders and members of the modern nation state. Throughout the nineteenth century and continuing up to the present the logic of national idealism 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"[25] seems particularly apt. And one characteristic of "vernacularly imagined communities" is their celebration and accommodation of the *vernaculus*, the

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[25]For a discussion of the predictably populist nature of "vernacularly imagined communities," see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), especially pp. 69–82.

native "volk." "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."[26] But in discussing the Mughals we are talking of a time before the advent of the nation, and of a time before egalitarian philosophies came to celebrate the "volk" of the nation. The Persianized urban élite of Mughal India did not conceive of themselves in vernacular terms—which is to say that their dominant values were far from being vernacular values; but, of course, this did not translate into an avoidance of the vernacular, or its strict separation from the classical language. Those who adamantly shared a courtly, élite sensibility could nevertheless use the vernacular, and did so to great effect. This means that in approaching Mughal literature we should keep open the possibilities of the infinite combinations and permutations of Persian and the vernacular, *while at the same time explaining these combinations in a way that does not presume a vernacular sensibility.*[27]

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[26]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." In "Language of the People in the World of Gods: Ideologies of Tamil Before The Nation," *Journal of Asian Studies* 55.4 (1998), pp. 66–7.

[27]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, especially among politically liberal historians overly-eager to find in pre-modern India glimmers of modern liberal subversions of hierarchic structures. One particularly unfortunate example of such historiography is Sudipto Kaviraj's attempts at outlining a logic of writing and speaking in pre-modern India. In writing of the rise of vernacular literatures he says: "They 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*

To fail to do this is to bury this literature and its users within the grave-yard 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 hope, the barest outlines of a logic of language use—enough of an outline to allow me to propose that for élite Mughal intellectuals Hindi usage was, among other things, a matter of aesthetic considerations. The aesthetics 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 *nāyika* of *Bikaṭ Kahānī*. Thus the resulting narrative could appeal more fully to the sensibilities of an élite Persianized reader like Mukhliṣ 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 does the heart upon hearing a "melody brimming with pain."

<p style="text-align:center">V</p>

So far I have addressed explanations which view Persianate Hindi literature as populist in inspiration and use. The other half of such explanations is the assertion that the masses being addressed by such Hindi literature were not only un-Persianized, but also non-Muslim, so that this demotic literature was simultaneously conversionary in its effects. It will again be useful to examine a pre-modern reaction to *Bikaṭ Kahānī* to see if for a Mughal reader "conversion" meant precisely the same thing as for Eaton and ʿAbdu 'l-Ḥaq in their discussions of Hindi Sufi literature.

The reaction to Afẕal is by the Persian poet Vāleh Dāghistānī (d. 1756), who in the 1730's compiled a biographical sketch of Indian poets writing in Persian.[28] In the section on Afẕal we see Vāleh grappling with the anomaly of a Persian-knowing élite Mughal poet choosing to write in Hindi. Vāleh explained Afẕal's motivation by writing, we would say con-

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Sudostasien, ed. Dagmar Rajanaygam and Dietmar Rothermund (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), pp. 33–4.

[28]ʿAlī Qulī Vāleh Dāghistānī, *Riyāẕu 'sh-Shuʿarā'* (London: The British Museum, ms. add. 16.729). The biographic incident recorded by Vāleh is reproduced in Shērānī, *Maqālāt*, vol. 2, pp. 67–8.

structing, a biography which portrays Af*ẕ*al as a convert to Vaisnavism. Vāleh mentions that although a *maulavī*, in his old age Af*ẕ*al fell madly in love with a young Hindu woman from the pilgrimage city of Mathura. So consumed was he by her that giving up both prayers and fasting he hung about her alley in hopes of catching glimpses of her. Spurned repeatedly by her, and ridiculed by the children in the neighborhood, he eventually shaved off his white *maulavī*'s beard, apprenticed himself to the Hindu priest of a local temple, and got busy learning the Indian sciences. Being intelligent he made marvelous progress in Hindi, and was even named the successor of the temple-priest. It was in his new capacity as the converted Brahmin priest that he finally managed to waylay the Hindu woman one day when she came to offer *pūjā* at the temple. When she saw the immense transformation in the ex-*maulavī* she was instantly ashamed of all she had put him through and immediately chose to convert to Islam and become his wife. Vāleh dates Af*ẕ*al's Hindi verses to the period of his obsession with the Hindu woman.

The question, of course, is how are we to navigate our way through this biography. Clearly, to read it as a factual account of Af*ẕ*al's life would be naïve; equally naïve, however, would be to dismiss it as *merely* a fanciful tale, for while it may tell us nothing of the actual circumstances of Af*ẕ*al'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 Vāleh followed in constructing his biography of Af*ẕ*al is a trope in Sufi hagiographies and is encountered most conspicuously in Farīdu 'd-Dīn 'A*ṯṯ*ār's thirteenth-century Persian masterpiece, the *Manṭiqu 'ṭ-Ṭayr* (conference of the birds).[29] 'A*ṯṯ*ār relates the story of a certain Shaikh Sanān 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.

In the inversionary logic of Sufi 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

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[29]'A*ṯṯ*ār, Farīdu 'd-Dīn, *Manṭiqu 'ṭ-Ṭayr*, ed. Saiyid Ṣādiq Gauharīn (Tehran: (Bungāh-e Tarjuma-o-Nashr-e Kitāb, n.d.), pp. 67–88. English translation, Afkham Darbandi and Richard Davis, *The Conference of the Birds* (London: Penguin, 1984).

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 Afẓal bursting out in couplets which praise infamy and destruction as a blessing on the suffering lover. From the Sufi 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 Sufi attains after enduring hardships, and which often leads him to act in outlandish ways. Of course, for a Sufi the unveiling of Truth through union with the beloved takes precedence over conformity to the rules of correct religious behavior; it is this hierarchy of values that the Sufi-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—Sufis 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 Sufi to loose his wits, ultimately the ecstasy has to be contained. It is thus that Shaikh Sanān returns to the Muslim community.

When Vāleh constructs the biography of Afẓal on the Sufi paradigm of the wayward but true lover, he hints that Afẓal's linguistic exclusion from the community of Persian-writing poets parallels the self-exclusion of the Sufi from the community of conventional Muslims. Thus the biographer casts the poet's persona within the mold of an ideal Sufi. Like *Shaikh* Sanān, Afẓal also emerges the better for this foray into *kufr*. In the logic of Vāleh's imagination the Hindi which Afẓal 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, whose biographic imagination was steered by Sufi paradigms, Afẓal'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 poet writing of love also trod. Vāleh must have been thoroughly aware that his inclusion of Afẓal in a biography of Indian Persian poets was questionable, since Afẓal's only composition was a hybrid Hindi-Persian poem. Thus, by including Afẓal in his biographical compendium Vāleh was in some sense offering a defense of Afẓal's choice to write in Hindi. In the logic of this defense Hindi was presented as

proof of Afẓal'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, Vāleh also explained the choice of Hindi by an élite, Persian-knowing poet in terms of an interface between Hindus and Muslims—but with one 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. May we, then, feel free to say that Vāleh 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 Vāleh 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 Vāleh 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 'Abdu 'l-Ḥaq Vāleh did not understand Afẓal's choice of Hindi exclusively within the binary framework of a Hindu-Muslim interaction. The conversion which Vāleh sketches presumes a rather different burden 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, Vāleh's conversion was not an apocalyptic event leading to an estrangement from an original confessional community; it was, instead, a liminal moment in the unfolding of a ritualized 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 Afẓal's conversion echoed an age-old debate *within* the Islamic tradition—the debate, that is, between a strictly legalist, literalist position and a Sufi 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 'Aṭṭār writing in thirteenth-century Iran of Shaikh Sanān's conversion to Christianity and pig-farming. Thus, the rhetorical effect of Vāleh's construction of Afẓal's persona as a Sufi heretic (*kāfir*) was to root *Bikaṭ 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 sidelong glance at non-Muslims. In 'Aṭṭār'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 Vaisnava priest. Certainly all of these accounts tell us something about the relation between Muslims and the various non-Muslims, but they do infinitely more than just this. They also, and I would say *primarily*, voice tensions within the Muslim community. The thrust of such accounts is not to articulate a dialogue with or against Hindus or Christians, but, rather, to illumine yet another facet of a debate central to the self-understanding of medieval Muslims vis-à-vis Sufism.

Once again I will ask a question with which I began: how do we do justice to the study of a community as intricate as that of Mughal India? There is a tendency among us to read the history of medieval India as the unfolding of an overwhelmingly agonistic dialogue between Hindus and Muslims. It is thus that we explain Persianate Hindi writing as the outcome of a Muslim desire to convert Hindus by speaking to them in their vernaculars. In so doing we move within the narrow orbit of a question that has lately held the Indian national imagination in its thrall. 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 late arrival in the Subcontinent, and, above all, a linguistic dependence on Arabic and Persian? In the post-Partition and post-Babari Masjid climate of South Asia the question has come to acquire a breathless urgency, for it is fundamental to the self-perception of both Hindus and Muslims as people with divergent religious identities and commitments. In India it clamors all the louder in the political imagination of an increasingly conservative Hindu majority trying to forge a national unity by presenting Islam as a historically persistent internal threat to the integrity of a Hindu nation.

The question of Islamic success has traditionally been answered in a number of ways. One conventional answer presents Islam as a religion of the sword, and so attributes Islamic success to a history of coercive conversions among Hindus. Indian Muslims as well as secular liberals have reacted with alarm to this image of conversion by sword, for the last century of violence has amply proven the potential of such images in sustaining social violence. If in such a climate of growing antipathy to Muslims the Islamic "success" in India is explained by means other than coercion, then Islam appears in a generally more favorable light and Muslims as less problematic on the national stage. It is here, in the logic

of a defensive Muslim and liberal response to the popular narrative of conversion by force, that the Sufi finds a useful niche as the peaceful disseminator of Islam. It is not an accident that in the historiography of such liberal Muslim authors as Maulavī ʿAbdu ʾl-Ḥaq Sufi authors minister gently and even "democratically" to the Hindu *ʿavām*, winning their hearts by talking to them in their own language. The role of the Sufi as a gentle preacher and disseminator of Islam is largely unquestioned for it is a handy counter-narrative to the long list of alleged Islamic conquerors (*ghāzī*) who sit so heavily upon the modern Hindu imagination. Presented thus, Persianate authors who chose to write in Hindi become instruments of an essentially ruthless Islam as it marches juggernaut-like upon a passive Hindu majority. To do justice to the complexity of Mughal society we might begin by asking if it is possible to place Hindi writing by Persianate authors within a broader range of aesthetic, theological and political concerns than is allowed by the logic of contemporary Hindu fears of a Muslim minority.

A proper acknowledgment of the complexity of Mughal culture will begin with the recognition that in addition to the dialogue between Hindus and Muslims, there sounded throughout Mughal history other dialogues—such as that, for example, between Muslims and Muslims; that Mughals like Vāleh sometimes made sense of their world in reference to these debates, for they may not have felt as sharply the Hindu-Muslim polarity which is so blindingly a part of our mental "furniture." The recognition of this difference between our imaginative world and that of Mughals does not demand that we naïvely accept the cheerful historical narrative of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood that is officially prescribed by the Indian government in its ceaseless propaganda at promoting a national culture of tolerance. What it does require, however, is that we recognize a fuller range of intellectual and aesthetic concerns animating the Mughals as they went about creating a cultural fabric that still retains the power to move us with its intricacy and subtlety. ❐