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CONTENTS

PERSIAN AS A PASSE-PARTOUT: THE CASE OF MĪRZĀ ʿABD AL-QĀDIR BĪDIL AND HIS HINDU DISCIPLES

Stefano Pellò

1. *Framing a Hindu Textual Identity in Persian*

If, how and to what extent the literary use of Persian by members of non-Muslim communities in South Asia[1]—a phenomenon which is unparalleled in any other historical context in the Persianate world—contributed to the process of cultural circulation and renewal in late medieval and early modern India remains largely unasked. As a matter of fact, an essentializing identification of "Persian" with "Islamic" and a preconceived understanding of Persian literature in India as a somehow impermeable and elitist whole, have until recently tended to prevent this issue from being addressed. Without presuming to provide definitive answers when we are still looking for proper hermeneutical instruments in a field which is partially unexplored even at the basic level of the identification of the textual material, this paper tries to suggest some promising research paths by focusing on the Hindu participation in the circle of an important Persian poet in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century India and on its portrayal in the contemporary and subsequent *taẕkira* literature. It can be seen as an exemplary case for studying transmission, change, and exchange at a literary level in premodern South Asia, involving a particular linguistic and poetic paradigm and the ways this is enlarged, re-shaped, and made to circulate through the encounter between a Muslim master and his non-Muslim disciples. More generally, this study might be of some utility in framing the (self-)understanding of the role of, and the values attributed to, the

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[1] The work by Sayyid ʿAbd Allāh (1942) is still fundamental. Other more or less general contributions are Nadvi 1938 and 1939, Roy Choudhury 1943, Bukhari 1957, and Gorekar 1962. A brief, recent survey is Pellò 2008a. Among the most recent and specific studies which touch on some specific aspects of the problem are Alam and Subrahmanyam 1996 and 2004, Pellò 2006, and Kinra 2008.

identities of the Hindu (*hindū*)[2] authors in the Persian written world from the late seventeenth century onwards.

While defending his own *ustād*, Mīr G̲h̲ulām ʿAlī Āzād Bilgrāmī (d. 1200/1785), from the biting criticism of the Khatri Persian poet and lexicographer Siyālkoṭī Mal Wārasta (d. 1180/1766), ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Ifti̱k̲h̲ār (d. 1190/1776) writes as follows in his *Taẕkira-yi bīnaẕīr*:

> This poor slave has witnessed an astonishing fact: Books written by Hindus who imitate Muslims and get involved in the Islamic sciences have no light and are full of darkness, since their titles are devoid of the brilliant glare emanating from the eulogies of the Lord of the Prophets—may God pray for him and for his family and give them peace. ...Hindus, who should not overstep their bounds, have to commit themselves to writing books about their own sciences.[3]

Such judgments should, of course, be seen more as polemic pretexts than serious arguments about the boundaries of cultural territories: A few pages later in the same work, Ifti̱k̲h̲ār himself speaks in very positive terms of another Khatri intellectual, Kishan C̲h̲and "I̱k̲h̲lāṣ", the author of the important *taẕkira* of Persian poets *Hamīsha bahār*, who is deemed a "skilful man (*mard-i qābil*)."[4] After all, in this period, Persian was, as has been pointed out by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "also a South Asian language for all intents and purposes,"[5] and it is not generally possible to distinguish a Persian *g̲h̲azal* written by a Muslim from another Persian *g̲h̲azal* written by a non-Muslim, as it is not generally easy to distinguish a Persian *maṣnawī* rendering of a Vaishnava narrative done by a Muslim from one accomplished by a non-Muslim. The expressive canon for writing Persian literature—with all its implications of thought and aesthetics—does not vary with a writer's religious affiliation. As a matter of fact, in the context of Persianate India the relationship between

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[2] In the Persian texts we deal with in this paper the term is used to indicate non-Muslim Indian followers of one of the Vaishnava (in the great majority of cases), Shaiva, or Shakta traditions; followers of the Sikh-panth are occasionally included among "Hindus". The word *hindū* has a long history in the Persian poetic space, being commonly used from the Ghaznavid period onwards, originally indicating the "native of India", by definition dark and an idolater (see de Bruijn 2004). The image of the *hindū* (as well as that, equally old, of the *barahman*) and related tropes are often used by non-Muslim writers of the later Mughal period as metaphors to describe themselves or their social groups, thus creating an interesting interplay between their supposed "real" and "literary" identities (see Pellò 2006: passim, especially 161–193, and also Pellò forthcoming). As far as the slippery category of "identity" is concerned, I draw here on Brubaker and Cooper 2000.

[3] Iftik̲h̲ār 1940: 5–6.

[4] Iftik̲h̲ār 1940: 20.

[5] Alam and Subrahmanyam 1996: 132.

religious, linguistic and literary commonalities, identitifications, and self-identifications is a multi-faceted one and it is not advisable, as Shantanu Phukan has warned, to draw any monologic correspondence between a literary or linguistic tradition, a confessional community, and an ethno-geographic origin.[6] Suffice it to remind the reader here that the Hindu Siyālkoṭī Mal criticized by Iftikhār because of his "interferences" was a firm advocate of "Iranian" linguistic purism as against the "Indianization" of Persian philologically defended by the Indian Muslim Sirāj al-Dīn ʿAlī Khān Ārzū. He also wrote a pamphlet against Ārzū with the very "Islamic" title—an allusion to a *ḥajj* ritual—of *Rajm al-shayāṭīn*, "The Stoning of Devils".[7]

Nevertheless, and above all on account of the peculiarities of this polyphonic cultural milieu, Iftikhār's remarks do have a weight, as do, for example, *munshī* Rūp Narāyan's words concerning the occasion of the composition of his highly refined Persian *Shish jihat*, "Six Directions" (1121/1709):

> The compiler of these lines, Rūp Narāyan, the humblest of all creatures, does not actually deserve to speak, but he dares inform the reader that one day an impertinent person said that he had not seen any ingenious work of art written by the multitude of the Hindus, stating that these people are generally lacking in natural skills, and they can only try to make the most of the company of learned men. There is no hope, he said, to see any ornate literary invention from the Hindus. Such words have hurt this slave and have driven him to write a tale which includes many a rhetorical device.[8]

What Iftikhār and Rūp Narāyan present to us is mainly a problem of literary acculturation, which needs first of all a literary treatment—so to say, a "decontextualization to better contextualise."[9] An analysis starting from the literary personas of some Hindu poets who were the disciples of a great author such as Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Qādir "Bīdil" (1054/1644–1133/1720) will help us to highlight some elements useful for approaching the implied

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[6] See Phukan 2000: 7–8. See also, to place the issue in a wider theoretical frame, Sheldon Pollock's observations about the lack of crude correspondences between religious or regional affiliation and literary language (e.g. 1998: 7, and 2003: 24–5, 31).

[7] See Shafiʿī-Kadkanī 1996: 116 and Faruqi 1998: 17–9. On Wārasta's propensity towards the exclusion of Indian authors as authorities in his lexicographic work, see the comments of Sirūs Shamisā in Wārasta 2001: 31; Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, however, has a very different position (1998: 19).

[8] Rūp Narāyan 1974: 2–3.

[9] I owe the oxymoron to Thomas de Bruijn's critical acumen.

issues (overlapping and fluctuating) of linguistic choices, religious traditions, and literary interactions.

The choice of the school of Bīdil among the many others in Delhi is due above all to the fundamental role played by this poet in shaping eighteenth and nineteenth-century Indo-Persian literature, which it is not even possible to approach without a knowledge of his work, both from a stylistic and a philosophical point of view. In South Asia, anything literarily significant written in Persian after his death has been written either *following* him or *refuting* him, up to G͟hālib and Iqbāl. Bīdil can therefore be considered the exemplary case to which one can compare all others. Moreover, his poetical circle in Delhi, along with that of Mīrzā Afz̤al "Sar͟khwush" (d. 1127/1715), was among the first to systematically include non-Muslim pupils eager to learn how to write Persian poetry and artistic prose (given its peculiar socio-political features, I consider the well-known court of the Mughal prince Dārā Shukūh as a case apart). This is, in any case, the opinion of Lach͟hmī Nārāyan "Shafīq" (d. around 1222/1808), who, in his introduction to the second volume of his *taẕkira Gul-i raʿnā*, which is declaredly devoted only to Hindu poets[10] using Persian as a medium of expression (to put it in the words of the Vaishnava writer himself, "the sagacious authors of the idolaters", *nuktapardāzān-i aṣnāmiyān*), wrote:

> In the days of Shāh ʿĀlam, Muḥammad Farru͟khsiyar and Muḥammad Shāh, thanks to the graceful company of Mīrzā Bīdil—mercy be upon him—many individuals from the people of the Hindus acquired the talent of weighing poetic expressions. And so the Indian parrots tasted a new sugar, as will become clear from the reading of the subsequent pages.[11]

As a last introductory remark, it should not be forgotten that the *taẕkira*, frequently rendered by the term "biographical writing", although usually rich in information and anecdotes of various kinds, is first of all a literary genre governed by its own specific rules and recurrent *topoi*, and should be approached as a kind of collective and transforming *Legenda*

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[10] On the use of religious affiliation as a meaningful organizational principle and structural feature in another *taẕkira*, the *Anīs al-aḥibbā* by Mohan Lāl "Anīs" (1804), see Pellò 2006: 144–153 and forthcoming.

[11] Shafīq n.d.: 2. Consider the method by which Shafīq grafts the Hindu poets onto the tree of Persian literature by transforming them into textual figures of Persian literature itself: The last expression is a clear reference to Amīr Khusraw (the *t̤ūt̤ī-yi hind*, "parrot of India"), as well as to a famous verse by Ḥāfiz̤: *shakkarshikan shawand hama t̤ūt̤iyān-i hind / z-īn qand-i pārsī ki ba bangāla mīrawad* [all the parrots of India become sugar-chewing / because of this Persian sugar-candy which goes to Bengal] (Ḥāfiz̤ 1996: 452).

Aurea of Persian poetry posing many problems of historical reliability.[12] Nevertheless, it is exactly this literary essence that draws our attention here, since it gives us the opportunity to observe the object of our investigation through the "internal" interpretative filters of several men of letters who often are in direct contact with the poetic milieu under investigation and enrich their own discussions with autobiographical notes. One of the literary *topoi* peculiar to the Persian *taẕkira* genre (be it devoted to poets or saints) is the *ustād-shāgird* (master-pupil) relationship: As a general rule, it is usually specified who was the master (or the masters) of the poet or saint whose biography is more or less schematically conveyed. When speaking of authors described as "Hindus", whose literary output was usually—at least at the beginning—the result of a period of apprenticeship in literary circles led by renowned Muslim masters,[13] this has an obvious relevance not only because it throws some light on the relations between the actors of the above mentioned interaction, but also because it allows access to the writer's point of view on this relationship.

2. *Dynamics of Interaction inside Bīdil's Circle*

On the basis of the information found in twenty-two Indo-Persian *taẕkira*s compiled between 1136/1723 and 1300/1883,[14] Bīdil had, during his long stay in Delhi (between 1106/1685 and the year of his death),[15] at least eight non-Muslim disciples, namely:

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[12] On this topic see the clear observations by Losensky (1998: 18–9), who, in his study on the reception of the Persian poet Bābā Fighānī (d. 925/1519) in the Safavid-Mughal literary world, has shown how his biography changed with the growth of his artistic fame (Losensky 1998: 17–55). See also the relevant comments in Hermansen-Lawrence 2000: *passim*.

[13] Things will change especially in Lucknow, where I was able to isolate as many as six non-Muslim Persian poets playing the role of "masters" in the *taẕkira*s (namely, Sarab Sukh "Dīwāna" who shifted from Urdu to Persian, Bhagwān Dās "Hindī", Mohan Lāl "Anīs", 'Awaẓ Rāy "Masarrat", Shitāb Rāy "Zār", and Ratan Singh "Zakhmī"; see Pellò 2006: 131–138, 142–143). Some comments on the issue of the Muslim *shāgird*s of Hindu *ustād*s in the overlapping Urdu context can be found in Faruqi 2001: 51–2.

[14] Ikhlāṣ (1973), Khwushgū (1959), Wālih Dāghistānī (2001), Ḥusaynī (1875), Ārzū (1992), Āzād Bilgrāmī (1871), Anonymous (ms.), Shafīq (n.d.), Qamar al-Dīn 'Alī (ms.), Muṣḥafī (1934), Khalīl (1978), Sandīlawī (1968–1994), Hindī (1958), Gopāmawī (1957), Najm-i Ṭabāṭabā'ī (ms.), Mīrānjān Ajmalī (ms.), Nawāb (1875), Nūr al-Ḥasan Khān (1876), Salīm (1878), Ṣabā (1880), and Āftāb Rāy Lakhnawī (1976–1982). A list of Bīdil's disciples and friends (Muslim as well as Hindu) can also be found in Abdul Ghani 1960: 82–9, 96–8, 102–5. This section is partly based on Pellò 2006: 92–108.

[15] Bīdil's biographical data are mainly gathered from Abdul Ghani 1960.

1. Lāla Amānat Rāy "Amānat" La'lpūrī (fl. 1740)
2. Lāla Sukhrāj "Sabqat" Lakhnawī (d. 1138/1725)
3. Lāla Shīv Rām Dās "Ḥayā" Akbarābādī (d. 1144/1732)
4. Srī Gopāl "Tamyīz" Dihlawī (d. 1147/1736)
5. Rāy Ānand Rām "Mukhliṣ" Lāhorī (d. 1164/1751)
6. Bindrāban Dās "Khwushgū" Dihlawī (d. 1170/1756)
7. Lāla Ḥakīm (or Ḥukm) Chand "Nudrat" Thānesarī (d. 1200?/1786?)
8. Gurbakhsh "Ḥuẓūrī" Multānī (d. unknown)

The *Safīna-yi Khwushgū* is by far the most important for our purpose. Compiled between 1137/1724 (four years after the master's death) and 1147/1734 (but with additions made up to 1162/1749)[16] by one of the principal Vaishnava disciples of Bīdil, Bindrāban Dās "Khwushgū" (thus offering an "internal" point of view on the poetic school), it is the text in which the largest amount of information regarding Bīdil's Hindu pupils is found. Khwushgū's collection of biographical notices represents, as far as these poets are concerned, the main source for almost all the subsequent *taẕkira*s, which often directly quote whole passages from it.[17] Therefore, our research is based mainly on the data obtained from the analysis of this text, and integrated, whenever possible, with the additional information offered by the other works.

   The first step in reconstructing the relationships between members of Bīdil's circle is to find out what these texts tell us about the personal ties between the master and his non-Muslim pupils. Clear statements on the subject are quite scanty, and predictably, most of them are to be found in Khwushgū's *Safīna*. Usually, they consist in the simple indication of a master-pupil relationship, or, in a more general way, they briefly record the existence of an artistic fellowship, as in the entry on Ḥuẓūrī by Khwushgū:

> He used to frequent the great Mīrzā Bīdil for many years, and so, through practice, he could improve the quality of his expression.[18]

Now and then, nevertheless, we learn something more specific, as with the brief mention of the assignment of the *takhalluṣ*, the *nom de plume*, to Ḥayā, a common *topos* for the *ustād-shāgird* dynamics in *taẕkira*s,

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[16] For a general description of this work and its relevant textual history see Naqawī 1964: 238–55, Gulchīn-i Ma'ānī 1969–71: 713–22, and Pellò 2008b.

[17] The whole biography of Nudrat in the *Gul-i ra'nā*, for example, is a quotation from the *Safīna-yi Khwushgū* (compare Khwushgū 1959: 352–5 with Shafīq n.d.: 165–9).

[18] Khwushgū 1959: 348.

comparable to the entrusting of the personal *ẕikr* by the *murshid* in the corresponding *taẕkira*s of saints.[19] So writes K̲h̲wushgū:

> He had the precious occasion to practice his poetry in the presence of Mīrzā Bīdil, thus obtaining his *tak̲h̲alluṣ* from him. He now speaks with the poetic tongue of his master.[20]

One of the most interesting and meaningful anecdotes is contained in the *Taẕkira-yi Ḥusaynī* and concerns Amānat's biography, which is absent from K̲h̲wushgū's work. Having characterized this poet as "one of those people who gained a great deal of advantage from Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Qādir Bīdil," Mīr Ḥusayndūst Ḥusaynī Sunbhulī goes on as follows:

> He himself [Amānat] used to relate this incident: "One night, I was walking near some ruins, thinking about writing a *dīwān* of verses, when suddenly, in the darkness, I saw a madman in high spirits dancing hand in hand, though respectfully, with my master. In the height of ecstasy, my master looked at me and said: Go, and a whole sea of pearls and rubies will for sure spurt from the spring of the particles of dust! And so I went, and I succeeded in completing my *dīwān* in a very short time."[21]

This account, which in itself has a clear symbolic value as a literary initiation, gains a definitely Bīdilian inflection if we consider that it contains some narrative motifs which remind the reader of some events, these too with similar symbolic meanings, related by Bīdil himself in his autobiography, the *Chahār ʿunṣur* (The Four Elements). As a matter of fact, Amānat's strange and decisive meeting can be compared with the encounters between Bīdil and his own quite enigmatic spiritual master, Shāh-i Kābulī, who suddenly appears and disappears three times in the mentioned text, also changing Bīdil's life-course as a poet. The image of the dancing madman, in particular, might be a reference to the narrative of the last of these encounters, when Bīdil, riding his horse in a Delhi bazaar, realizes that a dancing madman is following him in a kind of ecstasy: The madman turns out to be Shāh-i Kābulī, who, that very night, will reveal to his disciple many important spiritual secrets.[22]

As I have already noted, a relatively copious amount of (autobiographical) information concerning the relationship between Bindrāban Dās

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[19] On the structural features shared by the two *taẕkira* typologies—often not so easily distinguishable—in Persianate South Asia, see the comments in Hermansen and Lawrence 2000: 149–56; a systematic study in this critical field is still lacking.

[20] K̲h̲wushgū 1959: 183.

[21] Ḥusaynī 1875: 49.

[22] Bīdil 1965–6: 169.

Khwushgū and his master can be found in the section of Khwushgū's *Safīna* devoted to Bīdil's life and poetry.[23] In relating his master's life, besides underlining his own participation in the literary assemblies and discussions held at Bīdil's home,[24] Bindrāban Dās insists on the frequency of his encounters with the great poet, writing, for instance, that "the poor Khwushgū could gain the advantage of his company more than a thousand times in his life";[25] the settings of these intellectual exchanges are vividly described, thus suggesting a great familiarity with Bīdil. For example, Khwushgū recounts the long nights spent listening to the master among *chilam*s and water-pipes (*ghalyān*) and boasts of having recorded his utterances in a collection of *malfūẓāt*.[26] Sometimes, the author of the *Safīna* goes beyond the intellectual aspects of his relationship with Bīdil by relating as an eye-witness his own impressions of Bīdil's most private habits:

> In his mature years, when I, the humble Khwushgū, went to visit him every day, I could see him eating two and a half or even three *sīr* of food.[27] When he was young, he used to indulge in drinking alcoholic beverages, but these were not agreeable to his noble health in old age. It is for the same reason that he completely abandoned every kind of intoxicant.[28]

All in all, however, the interaction between Khwushgū and Bīdil is described by Khwushgū himself as essentially literary;[29] it is a fundamentally poetic

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[23] Bīdil's biographical notice is by far the longest in the *Safīna*: If we include the verse anthology, it covers almost 44 pages in the 1959 edition (Khwushgū 1959: 103–47), whereas the second longest notice, devoted to Sirāj al-Dīn ʿAlī Khān "Ārzū", is not longer than 19 pages altogether (Khwushgū 1959: 312–31).

[24] See, for instance, the first-hand reports of Bīdil's meeting with the satirist Jaʿfar Zaṭallī (during which Bindrāban Dās tries unsuccessfully to persuade his master, offended by Zaṭallī's irreverence towards the Mughal poets ʿUrfī and Fayẓī, to let the poet complete the recitation of his poem; Khwushgū 1959: 113), and of Bīdil's successful debate with an unnamed author whose *maṣnawī* had been sharply criticized by the poet of Patna (Khwushgū 1959: 117).

[25] Khwushgū 1959: 117.

[26] Khwushgū 1959: 112. Unfortunately, the work has been lost (see the comments of Kākwī in Khwushgū 1959: i).

[27] Again, as in the above-mentioned case of Ḥayā's biography in the *Taẕkira-yi Ḥusaynī*, there is an echo here of a fact narrated by Bīdil himself in his *Chahār ʿUnṣur*: In this text it is Bīdil's spiritual master, Shāh-i Kābulī, who is described as able to eat enormous amounts of food (Bīdil 1965–6: 158); it is interesting that in both cases Bīdil as a master acquires the features of his own master, who is essentially a poetic character created by himself. There is no doubt about Khwushgū's detailed knowledge of Bīdil's autobiography since it is directly mentioned and openly used as a source in the *Safīna* (Khwushgū 1959: 106, 109).

[28] Khwushgū 1959: 109.

[29] As a further example I should add the importance given by Khwushgū to his own achievements in composing *jawāb*s, "replies", to Bīdil's verses (Khwushgū 1959: 119–20).

relationship—in which spiritual and literary mastership are equated[30]—
which does not end with the master's death:

> Every year, on the day of his *'urs*, an assembly of poets is held. When all the
> creators of subtle images are together, someone reads a *ghazal* from Bīdil's
> *dīwān* and everyone, consequently, gives a demonstration of his own poetic
> nature. It is always a beautiful gathering, and I hope the eye of discord will
> always stay away from it.[31]

To find other evidence regarding personal relationships between Bīdil and
his Hindu disciples it is necessary to turn to sources other than the *taẕkira*s.
It may be briefly mentioned, among these "external" remarks is a private
note by Ānand Rām Mukhliṣ, who claims to possess an autograph copy of
Bīdil's *dīwān* with a portrait of the master on the last page.[32] Similarly to
Amānat's story described above, the portrait motif may be closely related
to an episode narrated by Bīdil in his *Chahār 'unṣur*.[33]

Going back to the *taẕkira*s, of course, many critical judgements are found
which underline the resemblance of the formal features of our authors'
poetry to their master's style, but they are external observations that do
not tell us anything exceptional about the relationships inside the poetic
circle, being usually limited to simple statements. For example, in the case
of Amānat's biography in the *Taẕkira-yi ṣubḥ-i gulshan*, it is merely observed
that "he wrote poetry following the stylistic path of Mīrzā Bīdil."[34] Such a
remark highlights once more the great influence exercised by Bīdil's style
on eighteenth-century Indo-Persian poets and provides us first-hand infor-
mation about the aesthetic opinions of the *taẕkira*-writers, privileged
spokesmen for all shifts in literary taste.[35]

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[30]   Quoting one of the praise verses written by Khwushgū for his master might be useful
in illustrating this point: *bāyad-am shustan lab az mushk u gulāb / tā bigūyam nām-i ān
qudsījanāb // sāmi'a-rā waqt-i gulchīnī rasīd / nāṭiqa-ra ṣubḥ-i ḥaqbīnī damīd* [I must wash
my lips with musk and rose-water / before uttering the name of the one living in sainthood
// The time to collect roses has come for the hearing / and for speech has appeared the
dawn of the vision of truth] (Khwushgū 1959: 104).

[31]   Khwushgū 1959: 123.

[32]   It seems that this *dīwān*, with an annotation by Mukhliṣ certifying that the authentic-
ity of the book was attested by Bīdil himself, is held by the Habib Ganj Library (I draw here
on information given in the usually trustworthy biographical work on Bīdil by Abdul Ghani
1960: 68).

[33]   Bīdil 1965–6: 281–6. A summary of this very interesting story, where a "living" portrait
plays the leading role, can be read in Bausani 1954–6: 172–3 and Abdul Ghani 1960: 67–8.

[34]   Salīm 1878: 37.

[35]   In the late *taẕkira Riyāẕ al-'ārifīn* by Āftāb Rāy Lakhnawī (written in 1883, when a
neo-classical "Iranian" linguistic purism had long been the prevalent fashion in the languish-
ing Indo-Persian literary realm), only one among Bīdil's non-Muslim disciples, Ānand Rām

As can be seen from the few reported specimens, there is nothing specific in the notices regarding interpersonal relations with Bīdil about any sort of "Hinduness" of the poets we are dealing with, whose connection with their master is, all in all, described in standard literary terms (the master-pupil relationship, the poetic initiation, the sharing of the same socio-textual spaces, the stylistic heritage) by the *taẕkira*s. A meaningful exception does occur, however, in the biography of Sabqat from the *Safīna-yi Khwushgū*, where we read:

> He was one of the pupils at Mīrzā Bīdil's sacred court, and his master used to repeat very often these words: "Among my Hindu disciples Sabqat has no equal."[36]

The testimony, though isolated, is noteworthy because it shows the existence of a tendency, within Bīdil's exemplary circle, to judge the work by non-Muslim poets as a separate category. Its relevance in a wider literary perspective is incontrovertible considering that the election of the "best Hindu poet of Persian" is a recurrent *topos* in many Indo-Persian *taẕkira*s. Limiting ourselves to two examples chosen from the texts concerning Bīdil's court poets, the late *Taẕkira-yi nigāristān-i sukhan* (1292/1875) awards the honour to Khwushgū,[37] while the earlier *Riyāẕ al-shuʿarā* (1161/1748) bestows the title to Ānand Rām Mukhliṣ. Most interestingly from the point of view of the history of Indian Persian, he chooses Mukhliṣ for his fluency in Persian (*khwushmuḥāwiragī*), unique, in the Iranian writer's opinion, among his co-religionists (*dar jamāʿat-i hunūd*).[38]

The extent of the interaction between socio-religious and linguistic-literary spaces becomes evident if we look at the features of some works written by Bīdil's Hindu disciples and the relevant remarks by the *taẕkira*-writers. As a matter of fact, many of them deal with traditional Vaishnava themes in their Persian works. Speaking of the devotee of Krishna Tamyīz, Khwushgū, who was himself a Vaishnava born in the holy city of Mathura, writes:

Mukhliṣ, is mentioned, but he is deemed "a pupil of Sirāj al-Dīn ʿAlī Khān Ārzū" (Āftāb Rāy Lakhnawī 1976–82: II, 192); significantly, Bīdil's poetic diction is judged as follows in this text: "Although there are still some, among ignorant Indians, who consider him to be among the most sublime writers, he is absolutely worthless in the opinion of those who really know the Persian language. His Persian, like that of Nāṣir ʿAlī [Sirhindī (d. 1694)], is worse than Hindī" (Āftāb Rāy Lakhnawī 1976–82: I, 123).

[36] Khwushgū 1959: 158.
[37] Nūr al-Ḥasan Khān 1876: 27.
[38] Wālih Dāghistānī 2001: 706.

> He engaged in a thorough study of Indian books, and became a man of great learning in this field … He wrote a *maṣnawī* on the beauties of Mathura and the Braj Mandal, describing, profusely and in detail, the peculiarities of these places.[39] He read it for me when I went to visit my birthplace.[40]

Also noteworthy is Khwushgū's mention of Nudrat's partial Persian rendering of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*,[41] especially on account of the details he mentions and the comparative evaluations crossing the literary and the religious fields:

> [Nudrat] translated into Persian the tenth *skandha* (*iskandh*),[42] that is, the tenth chapter, of the *Bhāgavat*, a book which is highly venerated by the Indians and deals with the deeds and the adventures of Krishna, whom they consider the manifestation of His name. This work consists of 14,000 distichs written in the meter of *Shīrīn u Khusraw*: The lines are well-constructed, flowery, and pleasant. While composing it he wanted me to listen to his progress almost every day. Once he presented me with this verse, about Krishna lifting a mountain with his forefinger, thus protecting himself for seven days from a violent, calamitous rain which is the symbol of the Last Day (*qiyāmat*). It is a very agreeable line: He easily lifted that heavy mountain / like the new moon lifts the sky with its finger [*sabuk bar dāsht ān kūh-i garān-rā /chu māh-i naw bar angusht āsmān-rā*].[43]

When dealing with Ḥayā's essay about the holy places of Krishnaite devotion, Khwushgū takes an analogous approach, using an assimilative/interpretative strategy to textualize the concept of the *avatāra* and at the same time to exploit the literary achievement of the Vaishnava poet to explain and illustrate the religious meaning of the Braj region:

> He wrote a prose work on the pattern of the late Mīrzā Bīdil's *Chahār ʿunṣur*, naming it *Gulgasht-i bahār-i Iram*.[44] It is devoted to the peculiarities of the

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[39] This text is now probably lost.

[40] Khwushgū 1959: 311.

[41] As with Tamyīz's work, this writing has also probably been lost.

[42] The printed edition of Khwushgū's *Safina* carries the form اسكندر, instead of the expected اسكنده. It is most probably a mistake by the copyist, since it is found also in other *taẕkira*s which drew on this text, as, for example, the *Gul-i raʿnā* (Shafiq n.d.: 126). Therefore, I give the amended form in transcription.

[43] Khwushgū 1959: 353. Especially noteworthy, besides the assimilative interpretation of Krishna as the manifestation of God's name and the use of the image of the *qiyāmat*, is the certification of the literary identity of Nudrat's poem by juxtaposing it with Niẓāmī's normative *Shīrīn u Khusraw*. Moreover, the association of the moon with the finger in the quoted verse might hint at the miracle of the splitting of the moon (*shaqq al-qamar*) with his index-finger by Prophet Muḥammad, related by Islamic tradition and based on *Qurʾān* 54: 1–2; this would represent a further, though more subtle, textual hint towards the "poetic transculturation" of Krishna's deeds.

[44] I have not been able to trace this work in any catalogue or collection so far.

Braj region, that is, the area of Mathura and Vrindavan (*Bindrāban*): It describes the special qualities of a land which is, in the religion of the Hindus (*mashrab-i hunūd*), the birthplace and the home of Krishna the *avatāra* (*krishn-i avatār*), whom they consider the most perfect manifestation of the Infinite's attributes (*ṣifāt-i nāmutanāhī*). I was delighted in reading it.[45]

Many *taẕkira*s, and very clearly the *Gul-i raʿnā* by Lachhmī Narāyan Shafīq and the *Taẕkira-yi Hindī* by Bhagwān Dās Hindī, along with the *Safīna-yi Khwushgū* on which they are largely based, show a very similar attitude towards such cross-cultural works (or, perhaps better, cross-literary works, as we shall see), trying to negotiate a quite predictable acculturative explanation. But not every writer can boast the privileged vantage point of Khwushgū, a member of Bīdil's court and a friend of the poets whose works he describes, nor the conscious perspective belonging to those who, like him, live on the threshold of multiple socio-textual territories, such as, his followers Shafīq and Hindī. A different point of view is represented, for example, by the anonymous author of the *Taẕkirat al-shuʿarā*.[46] Regarding Ḥayā, he writes:

We do not know the details of his biography, but judging from his poetry it is clear that he is an Indian and probably a Hindu, since he has celebrated the city of Mathura and other places of worship (*maʿbadhā*). (Anonymous: f. 275a)

Not all of Bīdil's Hindu disciples (nor, for that matter, all of the Hindu poets using Persian) have written literary works inspired by Indic religious themes (for instance, from among the poets of Bīdil's court, not a single text which could fit this category has ever been ascribed to Sabqat or Mukhliṣ); on the other hand, it is a well-known fact that translations and renderings, both in prose and verse, of works like the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, etc., done by Muslim men of letters are hardly lacking.[47] Nevertheless, the terse remarks by the author of the *Taẕkirat al-shuʿarā* are challenging and point toward the themes central to this paper. The widespread phenomenon of non-Muslim poets of Persian dealing, especially in the

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[45] Khwushgū 1959: 183–4.
[46] In his work on the history of Persian *taẕkira*-writing in the Indian subcontinent, Sayyid ʿAlī Riẓā Naqawī suggests that this book was composed around 1170/1760 (Naqawī 1964: 438).
[47] Consider, for instance, the well-known Persian-verse *Rāmāyaṇa* by Masīḥā Pānīpatī (d. after 1050/1640; see Jalīlī 2001). For further specimens, see specific lists such as those given in Habibullah 1938, Mujtabai 1978: 60–91, Shriram Sharma 1982, and Anusha 2001: 767–73; see also Ernst 2003: 174.

eighteenth century, with Indic devotional literature[48] appears to be an attempt to enrich the Persian literary tradition from within by giving a canonical citizenship to Hindu (especially Vaishnava) images and themes. This seems to be done, as the remarks by the *taẕkira*-writers we have quoted suggest, not by breaking up the structures of the literary palimpsests, but by making the new material pass through two complementary filters: the aesthetic-stylistic one, which is represented, in the case of Bīdil's disciples, especially by the expressive language of the so-called "Indian style", and the relevant philosophical one. The latter can be broadly described as comprised of Sufi-Neoplatonic concepts and interpretative frameworks (by the late seventeenth century deeply influenced by the cosmopolitan speculation of the philosophers of the school of Isfahan) readable, if necessary, as Vedanta and/or bhakti-oriented. (For the related phenomenon of reading Vedanta and bhakti material as Sufi across confessional communities, see essays by Busch and Orsini in this volume.) In other words, if a (manifold) Hindu individuality exists in Indo-Persian literature, it seems already integrated, at the very moment of its birth, in the organism containing it, as a literary mode and a further expressive opportunity which *enlarges* the reference system without *transforming* it. On the contrary, it consists of the new images that, in order to be accepted, transform themselves into something familiar to the Persian literary environment. A meaningful example, though still to be thoroughly investigated, is represented by the main work of one of Bīdil's Hindu disciples, the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt*, "The Epiphany of the Essence", by Amānat Rāy, a free rendering of the tenth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* into Persian verse as a long *maṣnawī*: The Vaishnava material is remolded in a style which generally seems to follow that of the *ustād* Bīdil; the title itself, very interestingly, appears as a conscious attempt to closely link the poem to the conceptual universe of the mainstream tradition of Persian poetry.[49] The poem opens with the following lines, whose meaning is self-evident from the point of view of the aesthetic-religious reference-system:

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[48] The relevance of this phenomenon had already been noted by Aziz Ahmad almost fifty years ago (Ahmad 1964: 235).

[49] The expression *jilwa-yi ẕāt* is employed in a famous *ghazal* by Ḥāfiẓ: *baʿd az īn rūy-i man u āyina-yi waṣf-i jamāl | ki dar ānjā khabar az jilwa-yi ẕāt-am dādand* [From now on I shall turn to the beauty-describing mirror / because there they made me aware of the epiphany of the essence] (Ḥāfiẓ 1996: 372). The concept of *tajallī-yi ẕāt* (*tajallī* is a synonym of *jilwa*), "the epiphany of the essence", is central in the Neoplatonic conceptual universe of classical Persian Sufism, and is explained in the popular Sufi glossary by Sajjādī as the "supreme manifestation of the beloved's beauty" (Sajjādī 1971: 118–20).

> ba nām-i ānki jānān-i jahān-ast
> <u>ch</u>u jān az dīda-yi mardum nihān-ast
> jahān āyīna-yi ḥusn-i ẓuhūr-ash
> nabāshad hī<u>ch</u> jā <u>kh</u>ālī zi nūr-ash[50]

> In the name of the Beloved of the world,
> who is hidden from the eyes of people.
> The world is the mirror where His beauty appears,
> no place is devoid of His light.

The interpretation of the *avatāra*, as the title alone lets the reader suspect, draws clearly on post-Ibn ʿArabī Sufi speculation and on the Persian poetic language, which had *formally* mastered it from the thirteenth century onwards; in our immediate context, this interpretation is closely related to the results of the already-mentioned philosophical reconciliation attempted by Dārā Shukūh around a century before. The concept of the manifestation of Krishna in the world as in the *Bhāgavata* is introduced with the following distichs, again drawing, in the opening lines, on the popular image—in mystical Persian poetry—of the reflection of divine beauty in the "mirrors" of the world:

> az ān pas ān sitāyish-rā sazāvār
> numāyān gasht dar shikl-i awatār
> ki ḥusn-ash khalq-i ẓāhirbīn bibīnad
> gul-i naẓẓāra <u>ch</u>ūn āyīna <u>ch</u>īnad[51]

> Then he, who is praiseworthy,
> appeared in the shape of an *avatāra*,
> to show his beauty to creatures, who see only appearances,
> and pick, like a mirror, the flower of the one who watches.

The poem is very frequently interspersed with <u>*ghazal*</u>s, to give it a recognizable literary identity before a Persianate (but also perhaps Persian) audience. Naturally, such texts written at Bīdil's court do not spring up suddenly and in isolation: As a matter of fact, they find many illustrious forerunners in the literary experiments carried out at the Mughal court in the preceding century,[52] but they seem also to be directly affected by the specific cultural atmosphere of the immediate environment in which they are born. It is Bīdil himself who shows a deep interest, both philosophical and

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[50] Amānat ms.: f. 1b.
[51] Amānat ms.: f. 2b.
[52] A typical specimen, comparable to the interpretative works produced at Bīdil's court, is represented by the *Omnāma* by Banwālī Dās "Walī" (d. 1085/1674; Walī ms).

aesthetic, in Indic literary and devotional traditions. From the *Safīna-yi Khwushgū* we learn, for instance, that

> the noble Bīdil was well-acquainted with theology (*ilāhiyāt*), the exact sciences (*riyāẓiyāt*), and the natural sciences (*ṭabī'iyāt*), and he had a deep understanding of medicine, astronomy, geomancy, amulet-making, history, and music. He knew by heart the whole story of the *Mahābhārata*, which is the most revered book among the Indians (*tamām-i qiṣṣa-yi mahābharāt ki dar hindiyān az ān mu'tabartar kitāb-ī nīst ba yād dāsht*).[53]

More decisive, however, is what Bīdil himself writes in his *Chahār 'unṣur*, where we find several descriptive and interpretative hints of the Vaishnava and especially Krishnaite religious sphere.[54] Particularly relevant, in the context of the present study, are the passages where Bīdil speaks about Mathura, a city much loved by him and where he lived for about three years.[55] In one of these passages, he gives a detailed and sensitive literary description of his experience of Braj pilgrimage centers, also adding some celebratory lines, perfectly in keeping with his usual style and, above all, drawing a textual identification between bhakti for Krishna and the unending "love for the unattainable" represented by the Persian poetic figure of Majnūn:

> In the country of Mathura, the market of passionate love (*sawdākada*), whose dark land has become a whitened, propitious mark since Krishna bade his farewell to the world, where the amorous air, like the sad loneliness of a sigh, has lost the color of rest and stillness, incessantly striving to reach that unattainable one, the tears of the *gopī*s (*gōpiyān*) are stormy waves still flowing in the waters of the Yamuna (*jumna*), and the voice of [Krishna's] *bānsurī* is still heard in its flute-like alleys, a soul-stirring modulation which makes the dust dance.

> dar zamīn-ī ki maḥabbat aṣar-i kāshta-ast
> gard-i ū kharman-i chandīn ṭapish anbāshta-ast
> bar bahār-ī ki az-īn kūcha damīda-ast nasīm
> jigar-i chāk zi ṣubḥ-ash 'alam afrāshta-ast
> hama tan shawq shaw wa wādiy-i majnūn dar yāb
> mashhad-i sukhtagān buy-i dil-ī dāshta-ast

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[53] Khwushgū 1959: 118. Bīdil's knowledge of the Sanskrit *itihāsa*s is actually a common topos in his reception: Significantly, as late as 1875, the Lucknow publisher Nawal Kishore still ascribed to Bīdil a Persian poetic rendering of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Nargisistān*, which was actually written by another author poetically named Bīdil, Chandar Man, who was alive in 1105/1693–4 (see Anusha 2001: 540).

[54] See, for instance, the quite technical—in Vaishnava terms—dialogue on the problem of Time between Bīdil and a Brahman who was travelling with him (Bīdil 1965–6: 41–5; the episode is roughly summarized and briefly commented upon in Abdul Ghani 1960: 54–5).

[55] I follow Abdul Ghani's chronological estimate (1960: 56).

In a land where love has sown a trace
dust has gathered a rich crop of palpitations.
On that spring whose breeze has breathed from this alley,
the wounded heart, at dawn, has hoisted a flag.
Be passion, nothing else, and find the valley of Majnūn!
The grave of those burned by love has got the fragrance of a heart.

Without any choice but to follow the decree of passion, I resided there for a period, and by observing the kaleidoscopic colors of appearance, I polished a mirror of astonishment. The cheerful lament of the sacred bells still caused the tumult of pride to fly up in the sky, and the hard beliefs of the Brahmans still adorned the embroidery of the *zunnār*s[56] with the stone-vein of haughty idols. The magic juggler of illusions delivered the sickle of a field of hopes to the talent of the nails of the *sannyāsin*s (*sanāsiyān*), and the spellbound blinkers of faith worked hard to cut off the hair of the pilgrims (*jātriyān*); to harmony, a minstrel playing sweet melodies, was entrusted the embellishment of the nightingale nests through the heart of the wise ones (*parāgiyān*), and to nature, a hunter with his snare, was entrusted the nourishment of the turtle-doves in their cages through the interior strength of the *yogī*s (*jogiyān*).

‘ālam na bulandī dārad u na pastī
dil īnhama ma<u>kh</u>mūrī u mastī dārad
az dayr u ḥaram maqṣad-i dil ‘ishq-i <u>kh</u>udā-st
īn āyīna sa<u>kh</u>t <u>kh</u>wudparastī dārad[57]

The world has no sublimity nor has it humility:
It is for the heart to be so drunk and intoxicated.
Temple and mosque, to the heart, mean love of God:
This mirror is indeed a self-worshipper!

Elsewhere in the same work, the spiritual powers of a renunciate whom Bīdil met on the outskirts of Mathura have a deep impact on his sensitivity.[58] It should be borne in mind, moreover, that the Braj area is also the scene for one of the three revealing encounters between Bīdil and his travelling guide Shāh-i Kābulī.[59]

   The poem on Krishna's deeds by Amānat that we have briefly introduced, and, in particular, the prose texts by Tamyīz and Ḥayā described in

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[56] The word *zunnār*, originally indicating a kind of belt or girdle worn in the Byzantine world (ζωνάριον) and employed in the Persian poetic tradition as a symbol of "infidelity", alludes here, as in other cases in the Indo-Persian context, to the *yajñopavīta*, the brahmanical sacred thread.

[57] Bīdil 1965–6: 148.

[58] Bīdil 1965–6: 279.

[59] Bīdil relates this event in his <u>Chahār</u> ‘unṣur (Bīdil 1965–6: 161–7).

the *taẕkira*s and consecrated to the holy Krishnaite places of Mathura and the Braj region, are likely to be ascribed to a precise interest in the master for that particular context of religious geography.

As a working hypothesis, then, we can say that Bīdil's Hindu disciples observe—while working as Persianate literati—Hindu traditions first of all through the interpretative lens of their *ustād*, who is in turn poetically fascinated, as in the above quoted autobiographical passage, by the Vaishnava devotion and religious milieu in Mathura. A telling sign is that the *taẕkira*s agree in assessing the *Gulgasht-i bahār-i Iram* by Ḥayā as a work composed on the pattern of Bīdil's *Chahār ʿunṣūr* or, more generally, following Bīdil's stylistic trends.[60] The central concern, in other words, is not an alleged "Hinduness" of the poets, but the poetic circle, which is the locus for the mediation between various superimposed (self-)identifications: As we have seen, most *taẕkira*s, which are the expression of an essentially literary memory, show it in quite clear terms. As an additional note confirming the canonicity of the products of the Hindu members of our poetic court, it should be underlined that the works dealing with geographical descriptions and celebrations, at least from the critical remarks by *taẕkira*-writers, take their place within an already established literary genre in the Indo-Persian context,[61] which is consequently only reinforced and subtly modified, keeping with the rules we have seen before.

3. *Beyond the Literary Circle: Widening a Cosmopolitan Culture by Localizing It*

"The cultivation of Persian poetry," writes Christopher Shackle,

> was always a central marker of the cultural identity of the elite, whose efforts to distance themselves from Indic cultural associations led to the formation of an elaborately self-contained symbolic system underlying the interlinked genres of *qasīda*, *ghazal* and *maṣnavī*. Such purism was not limited to Muslim elites; it also extended to the practice of Hindu poets from the Persianizing classes ... In other words, the wide-ranging and profoundly differentiated views of the premodern period are not associated with the Hindu-Muslim divide itself; they are marked more by class than by creedal separations.[62]

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[60] In addition to the passage from the *Safīna-yi Khwushgū* I quoted above, consider the following comments in the *Ṣuḥuf-i Ibrāhīm*: "Ḥayā was one of Bīdil's disciples: By imitating his master's style he wrote a prosework entitled *Gulgasht-i bahār-i Iram*, whose subject is the description of Mathura and Vrindavan" (Khalīl 1978: 52).

[61] The issue has been addressed by Sunil Sharma (2004).

[62] Shackle 2000: 56.

As a gloss to Shackle's statements, which are perhaps a little too rigid in reinforcing the idea of an Indo-Persian elite radically cut off from the other cultural worlds of premodern India, I would add that this "purism" is above all a formal one, pertaining more to *how* literature is written (the choice of the poetic register) than to *what* the man of letters writes (the choice of the poetic subjects). Especially for the *maṣnawī*, "Indic cultural associations" are acceptable and accepted by the Indo-Persian socio-textual community as long as they do not clash with the well-established—but by no means fixed and motionless—reference system of Persian literary expression, or, in other words, as long as they undergo a transcultural (but transaesthetic would probably be a more proper adjective, avoiding the risk of presuming fixed boundaries among cultures) restyling, as in the highlighted case of Amānat's *Jilwa-yi ẕāt*. The aesthetic provincialization of Sufi concepts through the use of Indic poetic forms and of a Hindu religious vocabulary is well known from regional (vernacular) poetry by Muslim authors. Although less studied as such, a similar process occurs in the cosmopolitan Indo-Persian literary sphere, especially from the late seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century. And if, as Shackle states with regard to the Punjabi context, vernacular Muslim literature helps the spreading of "a diffuse conception of South Asian religious identity,"[63] Indo-Persian literature, thanks to its Persianization of Indic elements, provides "local" religious themes with a cosmopolitan character and supports cultural circulation not only at the pan-Indian level, but also at the transregional one. We can consider, for instance, the role played by travelling Iranians such as ʿAlī Hazīn (d. 1766), and by the East India Company agents as well as the impact of the direct circulation of Indo-Persian texts and authors in Iran proper[64]—as a matter of fact, it would be somehow restrictive to look at circulation in the Indo-Persian textual milieu without taking into account its extensive connections with West and Central Asia. Such implications can be verified preliminarily by looking at the biographies of the disciples of Bīdil in some of the *taẕkira*s on which we based our discussion.

One of the missions of *taẕkira* as a literary genre is to transmit a certain view of literature (and of its producers) and to preserve a specific perspec-

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[63] Shackle 2000: 57.

[64] Ḥazīn's alleged comments on Bīdil's and Nāṣir ʿAlī [Sirhindī's] "incomprehensible" prose, regarding which he writes that he cannot imagine "a better souvenir to make friends in Iran burst out laughing" (Āzād 1992: 212), offer a stimulating hint in this direction. However, much more intriguing for the immediate context of this paper are the travels of Hindu Persian literati in Iran, such as Jagat Rāy "Barahman" (fl. 1091/1680–1) who, according to Shafīq Awrangābādī, settled in Yazd as a merchant (Shafīq n.d.: 29).

tive on cultural memory:[65] Some elements in our texts seem to indicate that one of their aims was to cater to a wide audience and to spread these views and memories among them, while providing them with "Indic" annotations. The *Safīna-yi Khwushgū* and the *Gul-i ra'nā* do this in a quite explicit manner: They exploit Persian, and at the same time, the opportunities given by the thematic openness of the *tazkira*-genre,[66] using the presence of Hindu poets within eighteenth-century Indo-Persian literary circles to describe, explain, and interpret many aspects of Vaishnava culture and religious geography. As underlined by Alam and Subrahmanyam when dealing with the *Safarnāma* by Ānand Rām "Mukhliṣ", the description of the socio-religious peculiarities of the Indian landscape becomes a "discovery" of what is familiar:[67] Typically, the Hindu authors of Persian *tazkira*s place themselves outside of the religious context they describe and to which they actually belong, speaking of Khatri, Kayasth, and Brahman writers as a category alien to themselves, tendentiously adopting the "international" perspective of a learned traveller to better communicate with a wide (and not exclusively Indian) audience.

The simplest and probably most widespread technique is represented by the specification of the social background of the non-Muslim authors; as a matter of fact, from the eighteenth century onwards, the indication of caste can be described as a topos of the *tazkira* genre in South Asia. As in the notice devoted to Srī Gopāl "Tamyīz" in the *Safīna-yi Khwushgū*, this often becomes the occasion to offer additional explanations bearing a socio-religious flavor:

> He belongs to the *sūraj brahman* people (*qawm*); among the Brahmans of Hindustan, the *sūraj* people consider themselves as being the descendants of the sun.[68]

In other cases, the indication of a specific social provenance provides a clue to supply the reader with precise explanations regarding non-Islamic Indian cultural traditions. This is, for instance, what Bhagwān Dās "Hindī" does while speaking of Bindrāban Dās Khwushgū in his *Safīna*:

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[65] See the discussion, mainly based on *tazkira*s of Urdu poets, in Hermansen and Lawrence 2000: 156–160.

[66] A classic example is the *Tazkira-yi haft iqlīm* by Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī (1002/1594), which is both a collection of poetic biographies and a work on world geography and ethnography. As an immediate forerunner, I would indicate the late seventeenth century *Mir'āt al-khiyāl* by Shīr Khān Lūdī, who deals with *prāṇa-yoga*—he calls it *'ilm-i nafas,* "the science of breath"—while speaking of Indo-Persian poets (Lūdī 1998: 107–11).

[67] See Alam and Subrahmanyam 1996: 142.

[68] Khwushgū 1959: 311.

Bindrāban Dās Khwushgū comes from the tribe (ṭā'ifa) of the bais (bays),
which is a subdivision (firqa) of the people (qawm) of the Rājpūts of Bīwāra,
a place in Awadh province. Their lineage goes back to Shalivāhana (sālibāhan),
whose calendar is used in Indian texts just like that of King Vikramāditya
(bikramādit).[69]

The pretexts for introducing such digressions in the tazkiras are manifold;
what is essential, for the authors, is to harmonize the extra-canonical ele-
ments within the literary structure they employ. In one of the most inter-
esting passages from the point of view of textual representations of
Vaishnava cultural elements in the whole panorama of the Indo-Persian
tazkiras, Lachhmī Narāyan "Shafīq" expounds some aspects of Krishnaite
devotion starting from an analysis of the name of Bindrāban Dās
"Khwushgū", always maintaining an essentially linguistic and poetic
approach:

He is a Hindu from the people of the bais (bays) ... He was born and educated
in Mathura ... which is a city not far from Akbarabad. His name is Bindrāban
Dās. Bindraban ... is the name of a place near Mathura; As for the word dās,
in the Hindī language it means "servant" (ghulām). The meaning of the name
is thus "servant of that incomparable place", as in the case of Najaf Qulī
["servant of Najaf"]. Mathura is the homeland of Krishna (kishan), who has
the largest following among the Hindus (muqtadā-yi 'umda-yi hunūd-ast).
[Krishna] had one thousand six hundred wives. It must be known that in
the religion of the Hindus (dar dīn-i hunūd) women can marry only one
man and cannot marry twice: That is why Indians always describe love from
the point of view of a woman. Krishna gave rise to such an uproar that
Indian poets, in their love compositions (dar taghazzulāt-i khwud), always
refer to the love of Krishna's wives for Krishna and do not speak about other
loves, differently from Persian and Arabic poets, who have no specific single
couple of lovers and mention now Laylā and Majnūn, then Wāmiq and
'Azrā, or Shīrīn and Farhād. In Hindi poetry the beloved is Krishna: Although,
according to Abū'l-Fazl's inquiry in the Akbarnāma, almost five thousand
years have gone by since the times when he lived, his fame is still alive and
from the earth of his homeland still rises the scent of love (az khāk-i waṭan-i
ū hanūz būy-i 'ishq miyāyad). It is a wonderful flowering land which throws
hearts into confusion. The noble Āzād—may his excellent shadow be
extended—writes: From the desert plains of Majnūn still rises love:/ When
I passed by, the heart palpitated down there [hanūz az dāman-i ṣaḥrā-yi
majnūn 'ishq mīkhīzad/ ki hangām-i guẕar uftādan-i mā dil ṭapīd ānjā].[70]

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69 Hindī 1958: 67.
70 Shafīq n.d.: 63–4.

Shafīq organizes his digression as if he is addressing a non-Indian audience, giving careful instructions for reading the words *bays*, *mathurā* and *bindrāban* in the Perso-Arabic script (the passages, which follow the traditional Persian lexicographic approach, have not been translated here), in all likelihood well-known to the whole Indo-Persian intellectual community, but not necessarily so for an Iranian or a British "international" reader.[71] The linguistic and literary point of view adopted by the author appears clearly immediately afterwards, thanks to the comparison between the epithets Bindrāban Dās and Najaf Qulī: Whereas the name Bindrāban Dās needs to be spelled and commented upon, the reading and the meaning of Najaf Qulī is taken for granted. Krishna, whose divine aspect is predictably never alluded to, not only is historicized following a well-attested Muslim intellectual attitude (the quoting of Abū'l-Faẓl's *Akbarnāma* as the authoritative text on Krishna's life by a Vaishnava writer is a self-sufficient explanation), but, most notably in our context, is described as an essentially literary character: The heart of Shafīq's speech is represented by a comparison of the psychological attitude towards the beloved in the Indic and Arabic-Persian poetic traditions, always observed from the latter's perspective (it is not by chance that the "Indian" love poems are defined as "*their taghazzulāt*"). Krishna and the *gopī*s are accommodated into the poetic *taẕkira* through the key hermeneutics of poetry, and this allows the author to give technical information without producing any dissonance in the dominant biographical and literary critical tune. The last section, where Mathura is described in terms similar to those used by K̲h̲wushgū's master Bīdil in the passages from *Chahār ʿunṣur* above, completes the normalization process by directly transferring Krishna (read as an amorous typology) into the Persian poetic riverbed: In Āzād's verse the sacred land of Mathura is absent but felt to be symbolized by (and to be implied in) the desert plains scoured by the lover Majnūn.[72]

As a last example, Ḥayā's biography in the *Safīna-yi K̲h̲wushgū* by his friend and fellow pupil (at Bīdil's *maktab*) Bindrāban Dās allows us to observe how the account of specific events in the lives of single authors can promote the insertion into the textual texture of the *taẕkira* of "exotic" pearls without creating expressive frictions. After celebrating Ḥayā's poetic

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[71] La<u>ch</u>hmī Narāyan's close links to the British, for whom he worked as a historian, are well-known; see, for instance, Naqawī 1964: 440–1, and Anusha 2001: 1518–9.

[72] Compare the verse by Āzād—as understood by Shafīq—to the third one among those inserted by Bīdil in the passage of the *Chahār ʿunṣur* translated above: Following what I have observed in the section above, one could start speaking, albeit cautiously, of a specific topos in the hermeneutics of the poetic image of Majnūn, sanctioned by Bīdil's authority.

skills by mentioning that he was able, in a literary salon, to recognize a linguistic imperfection in a verse composed by K̲h̲wushgū himself—which allegedly had not been noticed even by the renowned expert Sirāj al-Dīn ʿAlī K̲h̲ān "Ārzū"—K̲h̲wushgū writes:

> After that episode, he promised that he would come to see the humble compiler of this page in his house. On the fixed day, he joined the *mushāʿira* assembly and recited very nice poems. At dinner time, he justified himself pronouncing these words: "I am a disciple (*murīd*) of Gokula people (*gokūliyān*), and I conform to their rules, so I don't eat what has not been cooked by the disciples of my own spiritual tradition (*silsila*), otherwise I cook for myself." Then he gave his companions the permission to eat.[73]

Ḥayā declares his specific devotional affiliation and his strict loyalty to his religious community's rules by describing a dietary prescription in the middle of a poetic gathering, the *mushāʿira* at K̲h̲wushgū's home, which obviously perfectly matches the thematic framework of the *taẕkira* and Ḥayā's being part of the Indo-Persian literary community. It is probably the larger narrative setting (the poets' poetic discussions and gatherings) that offer here a valid aesthetic safe-conduct to such peculiar religious information; and the harmonization appears to be fostered by the choice of the usual assimilative lexicon, presenting the followers of Vallabhāchārya (the "Gokula people") as a Sufi *silsila* and Ḥayā as one of its *murīd*s.

4. *Conclusion*

Regarding the Sanskrit "new" intellectuals of the seventeenth century, Sheldon Pollock writes that "at the level of literary expression ... the seventeenth century was a time of border-crossings we are just learning how to perceive."[74] This lucid statement is certainly valid also for the Indo-Persian milieu, and also for the eighteenth century, one of the most neglected periods in Persian literature but also one of the phases which seem to most clearly show the innovative results of the acclimatization of Persian in South Asia.[75] The analysis of the specific case offered here can be seen as an attempt to begin understanding the modalities under which these circulation-induced innovations and border-crossings came into

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[73] K̲h̲wushgū 1959: 185.
[74] Pollock 2001: 20.
[75] As a matter of fact, as stated by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "Indian self-confidence in Persian reached its peak in the eighteenth century" (Faruqi 1998: 17). See also the comments by Alam (1998: 336–7) and by Tavakoli-Targhi (2001).

being. Even within the narrow scope of this paper, of course, many issues remain obscure: For instance, we need to address not only the ideas that circulate in, among, and through the texts but also the conditions of the material circulation of the texts themselves, including more precise details of their audiences and reception. We also have to better understand whether we can actually speak of a Vaishnava devotional literature in Persian, whose possible role and diffusion is not clear at present. Notwithstanding these and several other open questions, however, the circulation within Bīdil's circle and its textual representation clearly underline how Persian—as a cosmopolitan literary culture—was able to widen its aesthetic reference-system from inside by adopting a kind of inclusivist poetic hermeneutics. This phenomenon, it should be emphasized, acquire a deeper significance if understood as part of a wider trend of textual circulation marking the late seventeenth and eighteenth-century Indo-Persian intellectual world: As a matter of fact, in this period we not only see Ārzū's programmatic struggle towards a (ideologically crucial) recognition of a structural kinship between Persian and Indo-Aryan languages,[76] but also conscious attempts to compare the Sanskrit-based poetics with, and to "translate" them into, the Arabic-Persian system (as in the _Ghizlān al-hind_ written by Āzād Bilgrāmī, d. 1200/1785).[77] In this consciously cosmopolitan context—although conflicting with an ever-increasing, exclusivist "Iranian" purism—the "Hinduness" of the Hindu disciples of Bīdil (who, we have seen, had already textualized his own view of Vaishnavism) seems to perform, in many _taẕkira_s, essentially a textual function, an occasion for the inclusion and the diffusion, through the Persian _passe-partout_, of what I would call the familiar, pre-integrated aesthetic newness of a "Hindu" filtered experience.

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[76] See Pellò 2004 and 2006: 27–52.
[77] See Sharma 2009. It should be noted here that, according to Āzād himself, among the writer's friends asking him for a Persian translation of the work is Laẖẖmī Narāyan "Shafiq", the author of the here much-quoted _taẕkira Gul-i raʿnā_ (Āzād Bilgrāmī 2003: 26).

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