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(Raffaele Pettazzoni 1925)

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A Persian Praise of Krishna

A Note on the Preface of Amānat Rāy's Persian *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (1733)

By far the most influential Persian poetic school of late 17th-early 18th century North India, Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil’s (1644-1720) literary and philosophical circle in Delhi was characterized by a remarkable attention to the text of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and its devotional surroundings. According to *tazkīra* literature, most of Bīdil’s Vaishnava disciples produced Persian literary works, both in poetry and in prose, dealing with the sacred places of the Braj region and the figure of Krishna, a set of themes which are found as well in the autobiography of Bīdil himself¹. Among the several works ascribed to these authors, the writings by Lāla Amānat Rāy, a Khatri secretary connected to the court of Nawāb Amjad Khān, occupy a special place for their completeness and lasting fortune². Apart from an unabridged Persian verse rendering of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and an equally versified *Bhagatmal* (i.e., *Bhaktamāl*, a collection of hagiographies of Indian saints), Amānat was the author of a complete (and to my knowledge unique) Persian poetic rendering of the whole *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*: the translation of the 10th *skandha*, entitled *Jilwa-yi zāt* «Epiphany of the Essence», completed in 1733, was followed in 1751 by the *Srī Bhāgavat*, which includes the remaining parts of the text. In this paper, which is part of a larger project on Amānat and Bīdil’s school³, I will briefly focus on the long introductory section of the *Jilwa-yi zāt*, where some precious keys for the reading of the Persian Krishna are provided and which allows us – widening the perspective to the entire Persian *Purāṇa* by Amānat – to make some preliminary remarks on the reception and use of the text itself in the Persianate environment of 18th century North India.

The text begins with a description the formless and omnipervasive ‘essence’ (*zāt*), whose relationship with the realm of creation is explored along

¹ See S. Pellò, *Persian as a passe-partout: the case of Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil and his Hindu disciples*, in A. Busch - T. de Bruijn (eds.), *Culture and Circulation: Literature in Motion in Early Modern South Asia*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2014, pp. 21-46.

² As the nineteenth-century editor of Amānat’s Persian *Rāmāyaṇ* clearly states in his introduction to the book, his *Bhāgavat*, contrarily to the *Rāmāyaṇ* “which since its composition has been difficult to find until now” (*ki az zamān-i taṣnīf tā īndam nihāyat nāyāb buda-ast*), is by far the most “famous and renowned” (*mashhūr wa ma’rūf*) of his literary works (Lāla Amānat Rāy, *Rāmāyaṇ-i fārsī*, Naval Kishor, Lakhnā’u 1872, cover).

³ A much larger article on Amānat and his Persian translation of the *Purāṇa* is going to appear soon: S. Pellò, *Black curls in a mirror: The Persian Krishna of Lāla Amānat Rāy Amānat’s Jilwa-yi zāt/ ‘The Epiphany of the Essence’ (1733)*, in «International Journal of Hindu Studies», forthcoming 2018. This paper is meant as a preview of that study.

the Sufi-Vedantic conceptual lines of Amānat's master Bīdil, especially if we consider the cosmogonic theories dealt with in *maṣnawīs* such as *ʿIrfān* and, especially, the *Muḥīt-i a'zam* (which in some cases is quoted almost verbatim, at least as far as the process of manifestation of Pure Being is concerned⁴). Amānat Rāy's poetical theology begins, however, to acquire definite and specific tones from line 22 onwards. In line 22, built on a classic image of Suficate poetry, the 'absolute beauty of the Beloved' (*ḥusn-i muṭlaq-i yār*) is said to have suddenly 'become manifest' (*shud numūdār*). The cosmic event is explained as follows in line 23:

«*khwud-i ū āyīna shud khwud shakhṣ u timṣāl*
hamān yakrangī-ash dar gardish-i ḥāl»⁵

«He himself became the mirror, he became the person and the simulacrum, such is his unity of colour in the revolution of states».

The image chosen to is the pivotal one of the mirror, where the identification of the surface-instrument (*āyīna* 'mirror'), the subject (*shakhṣ* 'person') and the object (*timṣāl* 'simulacrum') of vision is an actualized declension of the traditional monistic identification of the triad of love ('*ishq*), lover ('*āshiq*) and beloved (*ma* '*shūq*). This identification had been already poetically recast in the visual realm (in that case, of painting) by another great master of late Mughal poetry, Nāṣir 'Alī Sirhindī⁶ and repeatedly played upon by Bīdil himself, for instance in the *Muḥīt-i a'zam* with the auditive triad *nay-naghma-muṭrib* / 'flute-melody-minstrel'⁷. Looking at Amānat's contemporaries, it is worth noting, as well, how a closely comparable image of the mirror is being used in eighteenth-century Iran by Hātif of Iṣfahān (d. 1783) to explore the Christian trinity in Persian poetical terms. In his well-known *tarjī-band* he speaks in this regard of a 'face reflected by three mirrors'⁸. The manifestation of the 'absolute beauty of the Beloved' in line 22 is undoubtedly reminiscent of a famous *ghazal* by Ḥāfiẓ of Shīrāz where the 'beauty' (*ḥusn*) of the Beloved suddenly appears in the eternal (*azal*), creational event of love⁹. However, once again, Bīdil's experimentations are clearly observable even here, in the connection between 'absolute beauty'

⁴ Cf. for instance the use of the imagery revolving around the idea of *taqaddus* 'sanctity', of the *muḥīt* 'ocean' of Essence, etc. in Lāla Amānat Rāy, Ms. *Jilwa-yi zāt*. London, India Office Library: I.O. Islamic 270, ff. 1r-1v and Mawlānā Abu 'l-Ma'ānī 'Abd al-Qādir Bīdil, *Kulliyāt-i Bīdil-i Dihlawī*, eds. 'A. Bihdārwand - P.'A. Dākānī, 3 vols., Ilhām, Tehran 1997: vol. 3, p. 583.

⁵ Lāla Amānat Rāy, *Jilwa-yi zāt*, India Office Library, London, I.O. Islamic 270.

⁶ The conceptual use of the metaphorical field of painting and portraiture by the rival poet of Bīdil in a very little known work known as *Naqqāsh u ṣūrat* ('The painter and the image') has been studied in Stefano Pellò, *Il ritratto e il suo doppio nel maṣnawī indo-persiano di Nāṣir 'Alī Sirhindī*, in R. Favaro (ed.), *La mandorla e il mirabolano: esotismi, contaminazioni, pittura e Oriente*, Cafoscarina, Venezia 2007, pp. 85-119.

⁷ Bīdil, *Kulliyāt-i Bīdil-i Dihlawī*, vol. 3, cit., p. 246.

⁸ See Hātif-i Iṣfahānī, *Dīwān-i Hātif-i Iṣfahānī*, ed. Wahīd Dastgirdī, Ibn-i Sīnā, Tihirān 1968/1347, p. 18. A classical English translation of the entire poem appears in E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol. 4, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1924, pp. 292-297.

⁹ Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīwān*, 3rd ed., vol. 1, ed. by P.N. Khānlari, Khwārizmī, Tihirān 1996, p. 312.

(*husn-i muṭlaq*) and its reflection in the ‘mirror’ (*āyīna*), which leads to ‘self-identification’ (*khwudbīnī*), explored in his *Dīwān* and his *maṣnawīs*¹⁰. It is in this context of dense intertextual references, conceptual continuities and aesthetic layering’s of renovation that the specific notion of the *trimūrti* appears, devoted after a few lines to the lyrical elaboration of the transition from unity (*wahdat*) to multiplicity (*kaṣrat*):

«*ba ḥasb-i khwāhish-i ān zāt-i yaktā
nukhustin shud si shikl-i khāṣ paydā
yakī barmahā ki dar gulzār-i dunyā
shud az nīlūfarī gul jilwafarmā
sabab-i ū shud pay-i tījād-i ‘ālam
ki bāshad bāqī-yi bunyād ‘ālam
dīgar ān jawhar-i i ‘rāz-i imkān
ba shikl-i bishn shud quwwat-i dah jān
siyum rudr ānki hamchūn turk-i bībāk
bisūzad kharman-i hastī chu khāshāk
‘inān-i ikhtiyār-i būd u nābūd
ba dastishān buwad paywasta mawjūd
ba zāḥir garchi dar guftan judā-y-and
ba zāt-i khwīshān īnhā khudāy-and»¹¹.*

«According to the will of that unique essence
as was convenient, three specific shapes appeared.

The first is Brahma who, in the rose-garden of the world,
became manifest from a lotus flower.

His function was to bring the world into existence,
to make certain that the foundations of the world are stable.

Then, that pearl of the deployment of possibility
took the shape of Vishnu, with the power of ten lives.

Third came Rudra, who, just like a fearless Turk
burns the harvest of existence like straw.

The reins of the choice between being and non-being
are always held in their hands.

And although they are separated in speech,
in their own essence they are God».

The inclusion of the iconic lotus from which Brahma appears (*shud jilwafarmā*) in the ‘garden of the world’ (*gulzār-i dunyā*) and the even more striking reading of Rudra through the metaphor of the ‘fearless Turk’ (*turk-*

¹⁰ A good example can be found in Bīdil, *Kulliyāt-i Bīdil-i Dihlawī*, vol. 3, cit., p. 246.

¹¹ Lāla Amānat Rāy, *Jilwa-yi zāt*, cit., ff. 2r-2v.

i bībāk) burning ‘the harvest of existence’ (*kharman-i hastī*), are powerful examples of how the wealth of material provided by the inventory of the Persian literary hypertext can be used in projecting ‘new’ material onto the hypertext itself. But they are also interesting examples of what the eternal ‘garden’, which had been the active background for most lyrical events in Persian from the Samanid times, or the beautiful ‘fearless Turk’ that had been destroying hearts from the very pre-history of the Persianate cosmopolis in Central Asia¹², can contain and evoke paradigmatically in an eighteenth-century Indo-Persian textual setting. In such a context, the unambiguous declaration of the fact that, for Amānat Rāy, Brahma, Śiva and Viṣṇu ‘in their own essence are God’, having the ‘rein of choice between being and non being’, appears to be perfectly naturalized in the canonical environment recreated in the *maṣnawī*¹³. Having thus cleverly introduced the formal foundations of his theological creed, Amānat begins to deal with the notion of the *avatāra* (*avatār*), to which he accords the function of making possible the observation of the supreme beauty ‘as in a mirror’ (*chun āyīna*)¹⁴. And after having enumerated and quickly described, in eleven *bayts*, the first seven *avatāras* (Matsya = *māhī* ‘fish’, Kurma = *kashaf* ‘tortoise’, Varaha = *Barah*, Narasimha = *shīr* ‘lion’, Vamana = *Bāvan*, Paraśurāma = *Parsūrām*, Rāma = *Rām*) he at last comes to the object of his poem and, as we shall see, of his devotion. The relatively lengthy passage presenting the figure of Krishna is worth translating in its entirety:

«*ba hashtum bār ān māh-i jahāngīr*
ba shikl-i krishn ‘ālam kard taskhīr
shud az ḥusn-i malīh-i khwud dar āfāq
namakfarsāy-i zakhm-i jān-i ‘ushshāq
‘adīm al-maṣāl shud dar khūbī u nāz
ki mānd az dīdan-ash muzhgān ba khwud bāz
ba mushtāqān numūd ān ḥusn-i mastūr
ki khalq az jilwa-yi ū gasht ma ‘mūr
sar-i gīsūy-i mushkīn-ash tā bar u dūsh
pay-i mardum kamand-i gardan-i hūsh
kulāh-ash az parr-i tāvus bar sar
ba khūbī rashk-i gardūn-i purakhtar

¹² On the metaphorical sociology of the Turk in Persian, see the introduction by A. Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade. The Imagery of Persian Poetry*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill - London 1992, pp. 137-143. Interesting historical perspectives on the formative period are contained in G.E. Tetley, *The Ghaznavids and Seljuq Turks: Poetry as a Source for Iranian History*, Routledge, Abingdon - New York 2007, esp. pp. 17-20.

¹³ Interestingly enough, Amānat uses here the poetic argumentation of the ‘three names’ and ‘one essence’ as the above-mentioned Hātif-i Iṣfahānī does when speaking of the Christian trinity in his famous *tarjīh-band* (Hātif-i Iṣfahānī, *Dīwān-i Hātif-i Iṣfahānī*, cit., p. 18).

¹⁴ Lāla Amānat Rāy, *Jilwa-yi zāt*, cit., f. 2v. A translation of the passage can be found in S. Pellò, *Persian as a passe-partout*, cit., p. 34.

ḥayā-rā hamzabānī bā nigāh-ash
ṣabā dilbasta-yi zulf-i siyāh-ash
bahā-yi jān du la 'l-i nūshkhand-ash
qiyāmat sāya-yi qadd-i buland-ash
ba tangī ghuncha mansūb-i dahān-ash
zi gham bārīk mū bahr-i miyān-ash
zi gawhar dar galū-yi ū hamāyil
hazārān dil ba yakjā karda manzil
numāyān gasht hangām-i nazzāra
ba jayb-i mihr-i tābān ṣad sitāra
guhar dar gūsh-i ān āyīnasīma
ba māh-ī kard kawkab dast bālā
kaf-i pā az ṣafā āyīna-yi gul
zi naqsh-i pā numāyān sāghar-i mul
shud az rang-i siyāh ān ḥusn mastūr
chu khāl-i mardumak sarmāya-yi nūr
bā īn tal'at shud ān māh-i dilārā
jahān-rā dilnishīntar az suwaydā»¹⁵.

«The eighth time that world-conquering moon
 subjugated the world in the shape of Krishna

That salty beauty reached the horizons
 spreading salt on the wounds of the soul of the lovers

He became incomparable in beauty and coquetry
 so that eyelashes, looking at him, remained spread wide.

He showed that hidden beauty to those who were anxious to see him,
 so that creatures, through his epiphany, became prosperous.

His black curls, reaching his shoulders and his breast,
 were a snare catching the neck of people's intellect.

His hat, with a peacock feather on top,
 was the envy, for its beauty, of the sky full of stars.

Modesty spoke the same language of his gaze
 breeze was an intimate lover of his black locks.

His two sugar-chewing rubies had the price of life
 the Day of Resurrection is the shadow of his tall figure.

From his mouth descends every tiny blossom
 and the hair derives its thinness from his waist.

Because of the pearl hanging on his throat
 thousands of hearts have settled in one place.

¹⁵ Lāla Amānat Rāy, *Jilwa-yi zāt*, cit., f. 3r.

At the moment of contemplation, there appeared
one hundred stars in the bosom of a gleaming sun.

The pearl in the ear of that mirrorlike figure
made a star to be imposed upon a moon.

The sole of his foot was pure as a mirror reflecting a rose
from his footstep appeared a cup of wine.

That beauty was hidden in its black colour,
as the mole of the pupil of the eye is the capital of light.

With this aspect that world-embellishing moon
became more close to the heart than the black stain».

Krishna is masterly described by recurring to the *sarāpā* (lit. ‘head to feet’), a little studied genre devoted to the detailed description of the beloved’s physical beauty¹⁶ comparable to the Indic *sikh-nakh*¹⁷ and which enjoys a certain diffusion in the late Indo-Persian and Urdu contexts. Thus, Krishna’s beautiful figure is studied through a fashionable poetic lens, which serves well – via the multiple aesthetic citizenships of the *sarāpā-sikh nakh* – in accommodating the traditional iconography of the *avatāra* within the textual environment of a Persian *maṣnawī*. Usually, the technique is that of selecting a series of deeply codified images that can, by close formal analogies or easy contrasts, be readily applied to the ‘new’ referent. In other words, except for the explicit mentioning of Krishna as the object of the description, no reader educated in Persian literary culture would find anything specific. On the other hand, the description is at the same time precise in its adherence to the prevalent iconographies of Krishna and shows, once again, how an eighteenth-century Vaishnava *munshī* – or, for that matter, any reader immersed in the multi-lingual and multi-literary milieu of late Mughal India – could recodify the centuries-old attributes, imagery and metaphors employed here and how vast a world of referents (i.e., Krishna *multiplied* in the mirrors of the multitude of named and anonymous beloveds of the Persian tradition) he could see in them. A most immediate example is the treatment of the color black. If the ‘black curls’ represent a perfect iconographic parallel, the dark color of Krishna’s skin is celebrated by its paradoxical transformation into a more acceptable white ‘capital of light’, through the similitude with ‘the pupil of the eye’, which in turn becomes a ‘black mole’ – the latter paradigmatically evoking the lingering image of the black *hindū* with which it is often in a relationship of syntagmatic cohesion¹⁸. The iconographic play on the contrasting ‘dark light’

¹⁶ For the history of the *sarāpā* genre in Persian see S. Shafeioun, *Sarāpā: yak-ī az anwā’-i adabī-yi gharīb-i fārsī*, in «Justārḥā-yi adabī» 43 (1389/2010), pp. 147-174.

¹⁷ Cf. A. Busch, *Poetry of Kings. The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, p. 158.

¹⁸ A critical review of this celebrated trope can be found in D. Meneghini, *Le Turc et l’Indien dans les ghazals de Hafez*, in «Annali di Ca’ Foscari», 29, 3 (1990), Serie Orientale 21, pp. 151-167.

of Krishna continues in the line that follows, where thanks to the formal analogy provided by the round shape, he can be at the same time a light full moon and the black stain (*suwaydā*) on the heart, which is a common figure of passionate love in Persian, deeply immersed in Sufi culture and alluding to Prophet Muḥammad as well¹⁹. It would be fascinating, in this context, to explore the contextual *pendants* of the apparent contrast that is drawn by Amānat between a Turk (white) destroyer Rudra and a Hindu (black) sweet Krishna (who is appropriately saucy like the dark gipsies / *lūliyan* of Ḥāfīz in a famous *chiaroscuro ghazal*)²⁰. Here, however, I will limit myself to underline that the oxymoronic (for the Persian aesthetic tradition) blackness of the beautiful ‘beloved’ Krishna will be discussed one generation later in Mīrzā Qatīl’s *Haft tamāshā* (a more than plausible audience for Amānat’s work), where the Khatri convert explains to his Iranian audience that:

«In the beginning, Kanhayā was extremely beautiful, harmonious, and fair-coloured (*ṣabīḥalwān*). At a later stage, he was bitten by a snake and became black, but his blackness was so well-blended that it captured every heart»²¹.

Amānat’s *sarāpā* of black Krishna as the eternal Beloved leaves no space for technical observations in the doctrinal field. In particular, nothing is added as far as the special relationship between Krishna and the ‘Essence’ is concerned, especially if we consider the theological issues introduced by the interesting discussion on the *trimūrti* seen above. A quick look at the later translation of a pivotal passage of the first *skandha* (as previously mentioned, completed in 1751 with all the other *skandhas* up to the ninth) is useful in gaining a more precise idea of who Krishna is for Amānat Rāy. The key *śloka* 1.3.28, containing the famous line *kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam* ‘but Krishna is God in person’ is translated as follows:

«dah awatār andar īn bazm-i ṭilismāt
numāyān gashṭa yakyak partaw-i zāt
zuhūr-i kirishn ‘ayn-i zāt-i yaktā-st
ki khwud-i sham ‘-i shabistān-i tamannā-st»²².

«The ten *avatāras*, in this symposium of magics,
have shown, one by one, the beam of the Essence,

[but] the manifestation of Krishna is the unique Essence in itself:
he is the very candle of the night-chamber of hope».

¹⁹ The reference is to the well-known tradition based on the interpretation of *Qurān* 94: 1-3, the black stain (the symbolic mark of ‘darkness’ on human hearts) on the heart of Muhammad was cleansed by the angels with snow when he was still a boy. It is tempting to see here a deliberate connection, in this polysemic black-white contrast, between Krishna and Muhammad.

²⁰ I am referring here to Ḥāfīz, *Dīwān*, cit., p. 22, sometimes read, in classical commentaries, as a reference to Timur Lang.

²¹ Mīrzā Hasan Qatīl, *Haft tamāshā*, Naval Kishore, Lucknow 1875, p. 15.

²² Lāla Amānat Rāy, *Srī Bhāgavat*, Naval Kishor, Kānpur n.d., p. 17.

Amānat's translation is quite assertive in its identification of Krishna with the very essence of God. Particularly if read in the light of the above-mentioned identification of the *trimūrti* with God (*ba zāt-i khwīshstan īnhā khudāy-and* 'in their own essence they are God'), the passage is transparent in stating the theological pre-eminence of Krishna (who subsumes, and thus precedes, the whole *trimūrti*) as the 'unique Essence in itself'. Especially noteworthy is the fact that the central Islamic notion of the unity/unicity of God (*tawhīd*), rendered by the use of the attribute *yaktā* 'unique', is expressly applied here to the 'manifest' (*zuhūr*) figure of Krishna. In Amānat's work, such doctrinal claims are flanked by devotional statements that are even more relevant if we consider the generic protocols of the Persian textual *milieu* in which they are inserted. This places the poetic figure of Amānat's Persian Krishna at the center of a much wider socio-textual framework, where the layered personality of an eighteenth-century Hindu *munshī* acquires a new centrality. Following an autobiographical passage, Amānat inserts in the general description a note on the reasons and the occasion leading to the composition of the book (*sabab-i nazm-i kitāb*)²³. Amānat first describes an archetypical night dominated by 'restlessness' (*bītābī*), 'bewilderment' (*hayrat*) and the absence of real inspiration for both spiritual enlightenment and artistic creation (*shikār-i šad khīyāl-i pūchmawhūm* 'the hunter of a hundred imaginations, without a single inspiration') in which he was wandering with his heart in turmoil like 'the wave of a vortex' (*mawj-i girdāb*). Then, he tells the reader, suddenly a 'rising star of happiness' (*tāli* '-i sa 'd) came to his aid in the person of an admonishing guide urging him to awake. The nocturnal event, which is strikingly resemblant of the encounter between Amānat and his master recounted in the *Tazkīra-yi Husaynī*²⁴, draws on ultra-classical models in a recognizable Bidilian style of diction. Here, however, the key figure leading to the literary-spiritual transformation in Amānat's life has a proper name:

«*buwad nām-ash zi fayz-i haqq dar āfāq
ba shuhrat bālakrishn-i kursmushtāq*»²⁵.

«His name is over the horizons for the grace of truth:
he is known as Bālakrishna the lover of soil».

The words addressed to Amānat by this cosmopolitan Bālakrishna are very clear in terms of the devotion required. After a generic reprimand concerning the opportunity of making something 'through which your memory will survive' (*bikun kār-ī k-az ān mānad yādgār-ī*), the butter-stealing child from Vrindavana concludes his speech by telling Amānat:

«*ba nām-i khāṣṣ-i ū lab āshnā kun
ba nām u nang-i īn 'ālam du 'ā kun*

²³ Id., *Jilwa-yi zāt*, cit. ff.15r–18r.

²⁴ See S. Pellò, *Persian as a passe-partout*, cit.

²⁵ Ibi, f.16r.

*aḡar dārī zabān dar kām gūyā
kanhayā gū kanhayā gū kanhayā»²⁶.*

«Make your lips familiar with his proper name:
say a prayer for the honour of this world!

If you have, in your mouth, a tongue which is capable of speaking,
say Kanhayā, say Kanhayā, say Kanhayā!».

Amānat's response to this request, which leaves little room for doubt about the devotional nature of this dedication, confirms the author's will to identify his spiritual path and provide his literary effort with a definite religious commitment:

*«chu īn nām az nishānī-yi ū shinīdam
ba maqṣūd ki mībāyad rasīdam
zadam būsa ba dast-i rahbar-i khwīsh
qadam dar rāh-i ū kardam sar-i khwīsh»²⁷.*

«When I heard this name from his image,
I reached the aim that was convenient

I kissed the hand of my guide
and directed my steps to his path».

As a matter of fact, Amānat openly declares his devotion here and there in the text, for instance in the *maqṭa* ' (the closing *bayt*) of a *ghazal* inserted among the couplets of the translation of the very first *adhyāya* of *skandha* 1:

*«ba madḥ-i bādshahān kay buwad sar u kār-ash
ki guftugū-yi amānat ba 'ishq-i siyām buwad»²⁸.*

«He will never be occupied with the praise of the kings:
Amānat speaks only of the love for Shyama».

The author's literary persona expressed by his *nom de plume* enters the text directly. In this line, Amānat sits together, so to say, with the object of his devotion, Krishna, who in the best Suficate tradition of the Persian lyrical genre, expressly subsumes the three-fold function of the *mamdūḥ* (object of praise), *ma 'shūq* (object of love) and *ma 'būd* (object of devotion). I suggest, in conclusion, that a philological study of Persian works such as the *Jilwa-yi zāt* and several others of its kind, as well as their transmission and reception, would assist us in decisively subverting many die-hard essentializations – first of all, in terms of linguistic boundaries and walls – and presentist views regarding pre-modern and early modern Islamicate South Asian cultures.

²⁶ Lāla Amānat Rāy, *Jilwa-yi zāt*, cit., f. 17v.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ Lāla Amānat Rāy, *Srī Bhāgavat*, cit., p. 21.

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the introductory section of a little-known 18th-century Persian versified translation of the tenth skandha of the Bhāgavāṭa Purāṇa, the Jilwa-yi zāt “The epiphany of the Essence”, completed in Delhi in 1733 by Amānat Rāy, a Vishnuite pupil of the influential poet-philosopher Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil (1644-1720). Notwithstanding its obvious relevance for the intellectual and religious history of late Mughal South Asia, especially as far as the use of Persian as prestigious literary-devotional medium among the communities of Hindu secretaries of North India is concerned, the text has never been the object of any study up until now. In these preliminary remarks, I focus not so much on the translation itself but on the relatively long preface embedded by Amānat in his work: here the author provides an articulate description of Krishna filtered through the Persian poetic canon and a series of conceptual keys for reading his work, showing the deep connections between the poetic lesson of his master Bīdil, the dominant Sufi-Vedantic views and the still little understood sphere of Krishnaite devotion in the Persianate environment of courtly Delhi in the 1700s.

Queste note sono dedicate alla sezione introduttiva di una traduzione persiana in versi del decimo skandha del Bhāgavāṭa Purāṇa, il Jilwa-yi zāt “L’epifania dell’Essenza”, completato a Delhi nel 1733 da Amānat Rāy, uno dei discepoli vishnuiti dell’importante poeta e filosofo persografo Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil (1644-1720). Nonostante la sua evidente rilevanza per la storia intellettuale e religiosa dell’Asia meridionale nella tarda età mughal, specialmente per quanto concerne l’uso del persiano come medium letterario e devozionale all’interno delle comunità di segretari hindu nell’India del nord, il testo non è mai stato studiato fino ad ora. In queste osservazioni preliminari, più che sulla traduzione vera e propria, mi concentrerò sulla prefazione integrata da Amānat nella sua opera, dove l’autore offre una descrizione articolata di Krishna filtrato attraverso il canone poetico persiano e una serie di chiavi concettuali per leggere il suo lavoro, mostrando le profonde connessioni tra la lezione poetica del maestro Bīdil, le dominanti visioni sufi e vedantiche e l’ancora poco compresa sfera della devozione kishnaita nell’ambiente persianizzato delle corti di Delhi nel Settecento.

KEYWORDS

Persian translation, *Bhāgavāṭa Purāṇa*, Bīdil, Krishna, Amānat Rāy

Traduzione persiana, *Bhāgavāṭa Purāṇa*, Bīdil, Krishna, Amānat Rāy