method would not ordinarily have been possible without the poet having models of Dakani verse narrative before him:

/Kadam Rā'ō said, Honoured Lady
Come, and listen carefully;
I'd heard it said that women
Do deceive a lot, and I today
Saw something of your tricks;
And ever since I saw those tricks
In real life, I have been
In perplexity. What I knew
By hearsay alone, I saw with
My own eyes. And since then
My eyes have had no peace.
Two serpents I saw, one
A female, high-born, the other
A lowly male, and they together
Were playing lover-like games
Of sex, and lust. As God
Did make me King, so how
Could I see such inequity
Of pairing? I sprang at them
With my rapier drawn
To finish it off then and there.
The female fast slipped away
With her life, leaving her tail behind/ 28

There is just one manuscript of the poem, now in the library of the Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdu, Karachi. The poem is very hard to read, even with the help of the facsimile of the original printed by Jālibī with his text. Some of my translation above is, inevitably, tentative. But the poem has an easy flow of rhythm, once one develops a knack for reading it aloud.

28Nizāmī, Kadam rā'ō padam rā'ō, pp. 91-93.
Chapter Four:
The Birth of Literary Theory

The most prominent feature of *Kadam rā'o padam rā'o* is its secularity. It has a moral of sorts, but it is basically a poem about kingscraft, miscenation, worldly learning, magic, and mystery. It is also a poem that is consciously literary. The poet regards the use of *double entendre*, or punning, as the essence of versifying:

/A poem that doesn’t have
Dual-meaning words--
Such a poem does not
Attract anyone at all:
A poem without
Words of two senses/.\(^1\)

It must be noted that Khusrau in his Preface to *Ğhurrat ul-kamāl* (1294) described himself as the inventor of a special kind of *thām* (a highly evolved kind of punning) in poetry.\(^2\) It must also be noted that Fakhr-e Din Nizāmi’s advent is parallel to, and quite independent of, Shālīk Bījān’s. The first stirrings of literary theory that we see in Nizāmi’s poem suggest that Hindī / Hindvi has now matured as a medium for creative expression. Also, it is significant that the first intimations of theory that we have in Urdu hark back not to Iran or Arabia, but to India, and to a poet who is a major Indian literary theorist.

It might be a good idea to pause here a while and consider Khusrau’s literary theory. His ideas seem to have had a quiet but far-reaching influence on Urdu and Indo-Persian literary practice, in the sense not always of providing guidelines directly, but of offering general support to literary activity.

\(^{1}\)Nizāmi, *Kadam rā'o padam rā'o*, p. 133.

\(^{2}\)Khusrau, *Dībāchah-e ġhurrat ul-kamāl*, pp. 63-64.
Nizāmī’s stress on ḫām, quoted above, should certainly owe something to Khusrav’s precept and example.

Khusrav’s influence may also be seen in the importance placed on ravānī (flowingness) in Indo-Persian and Urdu poetry. The need for poetry to be easy-flowing and amenable to public recitation must have been felt by the audience and realised by the poet from very early times. The modern Arab poet and literary theorist Adonis (‘Ali Aḥmad Sa’dī) says that early Arab critics 'praised everyday expressions and words which were easy to pronounce and sounded agreeable'. He then goes on to quote al-Jāhiz (775-868) on this point, as follows: 'The letters of the words and the verses of the poem should seem harmonious and smooth, supple and easy...gentle and pleasant, flexibly ordered, light on the tongue, so that the entire verse is like one word, and one word is like a single letter'.

This is clearly a good working description of ravānī, but Khusrav seems to be the first to have written about it in some detail. He created a somewhat complex, and certainly subjective, theory of ravānī—subjective enough, in fact, to make us recall that he knew Sanskrit, and may have been familiar with the concept of the sahridaya reader of poetry.

In the Preface to his Kulliyāt (Collected Poems), which he seems to have compiled after Baqiyyah-e naqiyyah (The Clear Residue), his next-to-last divān (c.1315), Khusrav discussed and graded his four divāns on the basis of ravānī. He said:

May this be in the consideration of those who have the temperament, that the first category of [my] ghazals is like the earth: cold, dry, dense, and brittle. And these ghazals with regard also to figures and conceits are dry, cold in ceremonial and formal utterance, and dense in their air, and inclined [generally also] toward density. And when those poems were perfected in accordance with my purpose, they comprised my divān Tuhfāt us-sīghar (A Youthful Work of Art)....

Ghazals of the second category were water; gentle and soft in the imagination like water, and superior to earth, and purged of the dust of all dense words: it is the Vasaṭ-ul-hayāt (Middle of Life), warm, and wet. You could say it is water boiling over due to the fire in its nature, thus attaining to the stage of air-ness from the station of water-ness; but they stayed within their water-ness.

In the third category are ghazals roasted, and baked, and most desirable. Air, like water, has the nature of warmth, and wetness. And these ghazals are soft, and delicate, and more flowing, and superior. And since softness and delicateness are not subject to change, these ghazals too are like warm and wet air. And ghazals that are most flowing, like delicate and clear water, and that have received great energy from the [poetic] temperament’s fire when it doesn’t fly high, and have reached the stage of water-ness from the level of air-ness: these are from the Ghurrat ul-kamāl (The New Moon of Perfection). All ghazals in that [collection] are of this category. It is proper that readers with fiery brilliance of mind should expand and interpret [them].

And in the fourth category are ghazals like the fire, for fire inclines toward elevation, and never brings its head down toward lowness, or toward the earth. Degradation has no way into it, and no temperament is higher than it, or can even reach up to it. Since the quality of fire is heat, [these ghazals] pass through tender hearts like fire through cotton, and soften the steel heart a bit, and if there is a heart that’s without the pain that generates love, they burn it down properly to dust. And the ghazals of Baqiyyah-e naqiyyah (The Clear Residue), and those that I’ll compose after them, due to the blazing flame and fiery brilliance of the [poetic] temperament that is in the poetry: I hope that through these fiery burning ghazals, I’ll render the sky’s sphere fully restless, as if the fiery flame of the ghazals, rising from its harvesting field, took the constellation of Virgo, so much that its brightness falls over all of the firmament and turns to water the light-house of the sun.

It is perhaps not necessary, and probably not possible, to give an exhaustive analysis of the theories, allusions, and wordplay involved here. The basic theme is that Khusrav sees ravānī as the quality of fire and water, or ravānī as being of the nature of fire and water. The best ravānī is that of water-

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3Adonis, An Introduction to Arabic Poetics, p. 29. I am grateful to Ashok Vajpeyi for bringing this text to my attention.

4Khusrav, Kulliyāt, 1967 ed., pp. 39-40. I have also before me the Naval Kishor Press, Kanpur, edition of 1916, corrected (=edited) by Ḥamīd Shāhābādī. Neither edition is very satisfactory, making it necessary for me to guess-read in at least one place.
turned-to-heat-(air)-turned-to-water-turned-to-air-turned-to-water. Thus there is native energy and free flow from one element (warm, wet, water) to another (hot, wet, air), and again into another (hot, fire), and yet again into another (water). Poetry flows like the rise-and-fall of music—only more freely, because air, water, and fire essentially follow their own bent, while music is bound by time and rhythm. The ravanī of poetry transcends the bounds of time and rhythm, merging and transmuting disparate elements.

Khusrau stresses the role of the proper temperament in the appreciation, and also production, of poetry. He begins the discourse of ravanī by appealing to people who have the proper temperament or nature. He uses the word tabē, the standard word in Persian / Arabic for the poet’s ‘temperament’. For example, tabē-e ravan means ‘the ability, the disposition, to compose fluently’. Of the many senses of tabē in Persian and Arabic, the following are relevant to Khusrau’s argument here: ‘characteristic, nature, character, temper, disposition, temperament’. The root word in Arabic means ‘to impress something upon something’, as with a seal or signet. Thus a person with the proper temperament would have to have some training, or early imprinting, too.

Khusrau twice uses the term tabē-e vaqqād (the brilliant / fiery / lively / heated / bright, hence intelligent, perceptive temperament)—once for the reader, and at another time for himself. Thus poet and reader both occupy the same space with regard to the making and reading of poems: one seems to merge into the other. Just as the poet has the tabē-e vaqqād to enable him to make poems, the reader should have tabē-e vaqqād to see and know what the poet is doing. The resemblance here to the notion of the sahrīdaya reader as elaborated by Abhinavagupta—the reader as one who has ‘a heart with the keen faculty of perception’—is obvious.⁵

The idea of the unity of fire and water as the essence of ravanī leads us to the notion of poetic energy. A poem that does not fully participate in its maker’s energy as embodied in his creative imagination, would be less ravan; on the contrary, it would be dense and brittle. Khusrau uses the words kastif and nāzuk, which I translate as ‘dense‘ and ‘brittle’, respectively. In Arabic and Persian, kastif has a generally unfavourable sense: soiled, especially with dirt, or grease, etc. But there is a sense of teemingness too. So a kastif object is dense, too full of things. Its opposite is latif, ‘delicate, light, soft, subtle’. So the kastif poem has too many words, and maybe too many difficult words—words that have bulk and body, but too little energy. This is borne out by Khusrau’s use of the Persian word nāzuk. It has generally favourable connotations: subtle, delicate, tender. But there are less favourable senses too: fragile, brittle, easily damaged; hence, lacking the proper energy and strength.

Shortly before the passages I’ve quoted, Khusrau spoke of the kastif-ness of his heart having been turned to water by fire.⁶ So it is the energy of the fire blazing in the creative mind that brings about the transformation from less ravan to more ravan. Khusrau builds upon this notion throughout the passages under discussion. Consider the following images: ghazals of the second divan are like ‘water that has boiled over due to the fire in its nature’. Those of the third divan are ‘roasted and baked’, they have the ‘energy’ of the fiery temperament when it’s not flying high. Ghazals of the fourth divan have the characteristic of fire, they burn through sensitive hearts, soften the hard ones, and destroy the loveless ones. They have energy and power enough to take the entire firmament, make it lose its peace of mind, and turn the flame of the sun to water. They do things, and have the energy of movement. They cause things to happen, yet their energy is not harnessed to causes social or moral, but to the cause of love.

Toward the end of his discourse on ravanī—and there is in fact very little else in this preface—Khusrau launches into metaphors that have astrological import; they also help wrap up the whole argument. He begins with the constellation of Virgo. Now this constellation is governed by Mercury, which has two signs, Gemini and Virgo. Gemini represents ‘mutable air’. Arabs call it al-jauza‘, which means, ‘a black sheep the middle

⁵Tewary, A Critical Approach, p. 33.

of whose body is white; since such a sheep is extremely prominent and highly visible in a flock of all-black sheep, and similarly, since the constellation in question has stars brighter than those in other constellations, it was called *jauzā*. Indians call it *maitihun*, which means ‘sexual intercourse’. The connections here with creativity, and the luminiferous, fiery aspects of the poetic temperament, are obvious.

Mercury’s other sign, Virgo, is called *al-sunbulah* in Arabic. It means ‘an ear of corn’ Arabs have another name for the sign: *al ‘azrā’, which means ‘virgin’, and also ‘Virgin Mary’. Khusrau uses the Persian word *khushah* for ‘constellation’; this is perfectly proper. But the word also means ‘an ear of corn, a cluster of small fruits’. Thus resonances are set up between *sunbulah* (Virgo, virgin, ear of corn) and *khushah* (Virgo, ear of corn). The constellation Virgo represents ‘mutable earth’. Khusrau described his early ghazals as ‘earth-like’, but earth mutated, or was transformed, or was purified of its dense elements, in his second *dīvān*. Connections are thus set up between Virgo as ‘mutable earth’ and earth-like ghazals.

The sign of Virgo is called *kanyā* (maiden) in Indian astrology and is everywhere represented as a maiden. It is a well-known conceit in Persian poetry to imagine the poet’s temperament, or his imagining heart, as pregnant, or even virgin-pregnant, and the poem as its child. In fact, Khusrau here may be thinking of verses from a *gašidah* by the great Iranian poet Khāqānī Sharvānī (1126-1198/9). Here are verses 23, 61, and 62, from it:

/I made the offering of a fast
Like Mary, for my heart is
Mary-like in purity, it is one
With the Holy Ghost, and it
Gives birth to Jesus.

My hands are the Gemini,
My pen is Pisces, the content

That I intend, is Virgo. Virgo is
Born from Pisces, by the motion
Of my Gemini.

Although my purpose cannot accrue
From those whose temperament
Is hermaphroditic, feminine,
My virgin heart is made
Pregnant by the souls of virile males.9

Thus the creative energy takes the poet’s heart (both Khāqānī and Khusrau make, in this context, abundant use of words denoting temperament, disposition, heart) and fills it with meaning. Earth (virgin, ear of corn) is made pregnant, ripened, by the fire of the imagination whose essence is motion (*rāvānt*). In Khāqānī’s second verse, the entire creative activity is depicted in terms of motion.

The constellation of Virgo is ruled by Mercury, which represents the mind, reasoning, speech, and writing. In the West, Mercury is known as the planet of the intellect. In Persian, it is commonly given the appellative *dabt-e falāk* (secretary to the heavens; *dabt* also means a scribe, one who is a master of writing). It rules all aspects of literature and ideas. Yet its action too, like that of the earth, is neutral. The poet makes use of the creative mind whichever way he likes. While Gemini, one of Mercury’s vassals, has an affinity with air, its other vassal Virgo has an affinity with earth. In Khusrau’s poetics, earth and air dissolve into one another and are transformed by fire into fire and light. The poet’s pregnant temperament / heart becomes the harvesting field from where the produce of fire is harvested. The fire then ignites the constellation of Mercury who is the master scribe of the sky, and the energy generated by the conflagration turns the sun’s light-house to water.

In addition to the astrological images, there is a good deal of interesting wordplay: *khushah* as constellation, ear of corn, the creative heart of the poet as a harvesting place; *dab* as water, brilliance; thus the light of the sun turning into water is also

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7Ghiyās ud-Dīn Ramāpūrī, *Ghiyās ul-luğāt*, p. 146.
light turning into light. The constellation of the Sun represents 'fixed fire', and its nature of action too is neutral. The heart, the head, and the eyes are in its special care. It is the giver of life, and produces the energy that endows things with life. Since in Khusrau's astrological poetics, his poetry makes the sun turn into water, and water is also light, and both have the quality of flowingness, poetry of the highest order should have the ravanāt and energy of light waves and water waves.¹⁰

The prime importance that Khusrau placed on ravanāt found echoes everywhere in Persian/Urdu poetry, culminating in the assiduous cultivation of ravanāt by the Delhi Urdu poets of early eighteenth century. One of the earliest poets after Khusrau to place particular value on ravanāt was Hāfiẓ (1325?-1398) in a famous shi'f:

/As for him whom you call
'The Master', were you to look
Truly with care—artificer he is
But has no flowingness./¹¹

Nearer home, Urdu poets in the Deccan, building upon the theme of ravanāt, took the next step in syntagmatic image-making, and introduced the imagery of the ocean, and of pearls in it. Shaikh Ahmad Gujrātī, in his mašnavī called Yāṣuf zulaikhā (1580-1585), praised his own poetry in the following words:

/Then the shoreless ocean
Of my heart came into flood
And the sky bent over

¹⁰The astrological information is derived from: The Book of Fate and Fortune; Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols.

¹¹Hāfiẓ Shīrāzī, Dīvān-e hāfiẓ, p. 135. Doubts exist whether this shi'f is actually by Hāfiẓ. It doesn't appear in many of the more authoritative editions of Hāfiẓ, while it does find a place in many others, and has long been attributed to him. What is important is the fact that Hāfiẓ is believed to have held an opinion about ravanāt, and gave ravanāt as much importance as Khusrau did.

To rain down pearls/.¹²

Mullā Vaj'hi (d.1659?), in his long poem Qutb mushtār (1609-10), builds further upon Shaikh Ahmād's image:

/My pearls began to gleam so
That the pearls of the sea
Turned to water within
The mother of pearl.

The diver, were he to dive
For a hundred thousand years
Wouldn't find one pearl
Of such water. These are
Not the pearls that come

To the diver's hand.
Or to anyone's hand. Divers
Beyond count have dipped
And dived in this ocean
Only to die./¹³

In 1666, we find Nuṣratī Bijāpūrī (1600-1674) praising his poet-king 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh (r.1656-1672) in his long poem 'Alī nāmah thus:

/Your mind is limpid, your
Temperament clear and pure,
Valuer of speech, subtle
And sharp, it can cleave
Even a hair.

Poetry is but a wave
From the ocean of your heart,
The army of your thoughts
Looks down upon the sky/.¹⁴

Earlier in the poem, the poet invoked God's benediction upon himself, and among other things, he said:

¹²Ahmād Gujrātī, Yāṣuf zulaikhā, p. 215.

¹³Vaj'hi, Qutb mushtār, p. 56.

¹⁴Nuṣratī Bijāpūrī, 'Alī nāmah, p. 27.
Early Urdu Literary Culture

/Let my thoughts fly high, like the winds,
To my temperament, give
The ocean's perpetual wave and flow/.

Nuṣratī also spoke in this poem of maẓnān (theme), as opposed to ma'ānī (meaning), a distinction that seems first to have been made in India, perhaps under the influence of Sanskrit, by the sabk-i hindī (Indian style) Persian poets of his time. This distinction later became an important part of the poetics of the Urdu ghazal in eighteenth-century Delhi.

Then we have Valī (1665/67-1707/8), who used the ocean-flow image to double purpose: praise of the ravānī of his verse, and also of the beloved's flowing tresses:

/In praise of your tresses
Wave upon wave of truths, and meanings
Comes into flow every night
Like the ocean of my temperament.

Such is the power
Of the waves of my poetry
That it were proper for
My temperament to be compared
To an ocean/.

Urdu poets in early-eighteenth-century Delhi made ravānī one of the cornerstones of the new poetics that was emerging at that time. I call this poetics 'new' in the sense that it sought, consciously or otherwise, to pull together a lot of thinking and intuitive feeling about the nature of poetry that had been gathering in the Urdu literary culture over the centuries, through diverse sources. Ravānī became a popular term of praise and appreciation in the Urdu prose and poetry of that time. Here is just one instance, from Shāhīr Nājī (1690?-1744), included partly because of its delightfulness, and partly because it closely echoes what I have just quoted above from Valī:

/The flowingness of my temperament

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15Nuṣratī Bijāpūrī, All nāmah, p. 10.
16Valī Dakānī, Kulliyāt-e vallī, p. 239.

Four: Literary Theory

Is no less, oh Nājī,
Than that of the ocean,
 Were someone to write a ghazal
Like this ghazal of mine,
I would become their water carrier/.

Perhaps the most powerful single component in the matrix of Muslim literary ideas and practice is the Qur'ān, which is believed to be uncreated, and yet is a miracle of textual creation. Poetry therefore tried to approximate to this miracle. Literary criticism began among the Muslims with exegeses of the Qur'ān dealing with the beauties of the Qur'ānic language. Even Ibn al-Mu'tazz, writing in 887 his ground-breaking Kitāb ul-bādī' (The Book of New Beauties), declared that bādī' (verbal devices) had always been there in the discourse of the Arabs and the Qur'ān, except for the somewhat artificial quality of 'dialectical argument' found in modern poetry.

Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych quite properly identifies the pre-Islamic gaštādah and the Qur'ān as 'the twin foundations of Arab-Islamic literary culture'. She goes on to say that just as the Qur'ānic text was held to be inimitable, its poetry was considered to be of a quality unattainable by the poets of the Islamic period. The Qur'ān was seen by all Muslim poets as the repository of all wisdom, and also as the supreme exemplar of balāghat. This latter is a comprehensive and complex term, impossible to translate in one word. It is generally translated as 'eloquence', suggesting that it is akin to the concepts found in the Greek discipline of Rhetoric. In fact, it is a term whose action is better understood in terms of poetics. The condition of balāghat implies the presence of the following things: the words used in the text should be the most appropriate for the occasion; they should convey the theme, or the subject, of the discourse accurately, without giving the impression of excess; the text should, therefore, not contain any words that do not actively contribute to establishing the purport of the discourse; the full expressive potential of language should be seen to be at

17Nājī, Divān-e shāhīr nāfī, p. 342.
18Stetkevych, The Mute Immortals Speak, p. xi.
the command of the text-maker, and yet it should be possible to
determine the intent of the text-maker, because the language
used by him, even if unusual or metaphorical, somehow
manages to conform to the standard register. 19

The Qur’ān, by definition, was seen to contain the principles
of all knowledge and the secrets of all wisdom—Khusrau said,
‘All the knowledge that was in land and sea was in the ocean of
the Qur’ān, and thus if anyone said that poetry was not in the
Praised and Exalted Book, he denied the Qur’ān’. 20 Since the
Qur’ān was, again by definition, also the most beautiful text, it
was proper to place both the mind and heart of poetry in the
Qur’ānic context. This great theological leap was made by
Khusrau in the Dībāchah (Preface) to his third diwan, Ghurrat
ul-kamāl. He presented the case for poetry in the following
words:

The essence of poetry is fully in consonance with the essence of
knowledge (‘ilm) in both word and spirit. In word, because the
Qur’ān tells us wa hum là yash’urān, that is, wa hum là ya’lamān. 21
And in spirit, because it has reached us from the
Prophet, peace be upon him, in decisive words: ‘Undoubtedly
wisdom is from poetry’. And in the firmly declared and clear
verses of the Qur’ān, ‘wisdom’ (ḥikmat) has been used clearly
in the sense of ‘knowledge’ (‘ilm), as follows: ‘And he to whom

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19Many of these positions were developed or elaborated by ‘Abd
ul-Qāhir Jurjānī (d.1078) in his Dalā’il al-īfāz (Proofs for the
Miracle) and Aṣrār al-balāgha (The secrets of balāgha). For an
excellent discussion of Jurjānī, see Abu Deeb’s Al-Jurjānī’s Theory
of Poetic Imagery and his ‘Literary Criticism’ chapter in The Cambridge
History of Arabic Literature.


21They have no awareness’ and ‘They do not know.’ The Arabic
word for poetry, shīr, is from the root shīn, ‘ain, rā, from which one
gets shā’ar, ‘to know, to be sensible [of something],’ and shā’ar,
‘consciousness beyond the ordinary’ (see Fazlur Rahman, Major
Themes of the Qur’ān, p. 80; and ‘Abd ul-Ḥāfīz Ballīyāvī, Misbāḥ ul-
lughāt, p. 411). Khusrau takes advantage of the common root shīr
and claims, plausibly enough, that since yash’urān means the same as
ya’lamān, poetry (shīr) and knowledge (‘ilm) are the same.

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23Imām Buḥārī records only the first part of this Tradition. Imām
Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal records it in full, though without the intensifier
lām which occurs before both hikmat and shīr in the version quoted
by Khusrau. See ibn Ḥanbal’s Musnad (Beirut, n.d., vol. 1, p. 309). I
am grateful to Dr. Zafar Ahmad Siddiqi of Aligarh Muslim University
for this information. There is, of course, another interpretation of this
Tradition, which is not so unequivocally in favour of poetry. But I am
here concerned with Khusrau’s poetics, and what he makes of the
Tradition.

Nawāb Siddiqi Ḥasan Khān (1828-95), who was, among other
things, a leading nineteenth-century scholar of the Prophet’s
Traditions, discusses the Tradition in question at some length in his
tazkīrah, Shām-e ānjuman. His conclusions are a little cautious,
compared to Khusrau’s exuberant celebration of poetry’s
epistemological status. He doesn’t, however, doubt that the Tradition
affirms that ‘some poems are words of knowledge and wisdom, and
since words of knowledge and wisdom are [according to another
Tradition] the goal of the Believer’s persistent search, so some poetry
too has the status of being the goal of the Believer’s persistent search
[just as one searches for one’s lost property]’ (Siddiqi Ḥasan Khān,
Shām-e ānjuman, pp. 17-18).

24The nightingale of the garden of mā zāgh signifies the Prophet
Muḥammad. It is a beautiful pun involving a Qur’ānic phrase (53:17)
about the Prophet: ‘His sight never swerved / Nor did it go wrong’
(trans. by Abdullah Yusuf Ali). Since this verse is God’s praise for the
Prophet, Khusrau imagines the whole verse (signalled in his text by
the first two words, mā zāgh), as a garden of which Muḥammad is the
nightingale. Since in Persian, mā means ‘we, us’, and zāgh means
‘crow’, and there are many tree metaphors in the passage, the pun
becomes extremely complex and delightfully picayune.
imagine the exalted station of him about whom the incontrovertible Qur'ānic verse says, 'He who was given wisdom was given the Good in large measure.' And the Best of Human Beings [Muḥammad] says in the Tradition that wisdom is a category of poetry, and not that poetry is a category of wisdom. For [his words are] 'Undoubtedly wisdom is from poetry', and not the reverse, that 'undoubtedly poetry is from wisdom'. Thus poetry is superior to wisdom, and wisdom lies deep at the bottom of poetry. And a poet can be called a philosopher [ḥakīm], but a philosopher cannot be called a poet. [The Prophet] describes magic as discourse, not discourse from magic. Thus a poet can be described as a magician, but a magician cannot described as a poet.

Khusrau’s brilliance lay not so much in proposing a new theory, as in presenting a fusion of two worlds, and enunciating a new argument in favour of the fusion. The general principle that he implied here—that poetry was a body of knowledge in its own right, that it was concerned with larger issues and not with the statement of ‘truths’ seen from a personal or ‘objective’ standpoint—was implied in the literary theory of the Arabs, and was not too far distant from the positions taken by the Indians in regard to the uses of poetry. For both saw poems as meaningful, but not information-giving, texts. And it is in this context that Khusrau’s role in formulating the literary taste of Urdu seems most significant.

It is a measure of the special value placed by the Indo-Muslim poetic culture on meaning generation that among Khusrau’s ‘firsts’ in poetry of which he is especially proud is a special kind of pun, and the fact that he relates punning directly to meaning generation. He says in the Dībāchāh-e ghurrat ul-kamāl:

Before now, the tongue of the poets, which is the hair-dresser and adorn of poetry, did hair-splitting in thām such that two subtle points resulted. This servant, by his sharp pen, split the point of

25 Here, I give a literal rendering of Khusrau’s Persian translation of the verse (2:269) quoted by him earlier in the original Arabic.

26 Khusrau, Dībāchāh-e ghurrat ul-kamāl, pp. 18-19. A good discussion of some of Khusrau’s ideas on this can be found in Jamāl Ḥusain, ‘Dībāchāh-e ghurrat ul-kamāl kt ma‘nāviyat’.

the hair of meaning such that seven subtle points were obtained from one hair…. In brief, if in times before, the image presented by thām had two faces, and whoever looked [at the thām] was astonished, Khusrau’s temperament has devised an thām having more reflectivity than the mirror. For in the mirror, there is only one image, and it cannot show more than one idea. Yet this [thām of mine] is a mirror such that if you place one face before it, seven proper and bright ideas appear.

/Your intrepid falcon, playing
With its own life, would engage
The Sīnūrgh in mortal combat
Were you to set, oh massive-headed
Lion, your falcon to hunt/.

Khusrau now proceeds to show that through one change in punctuation, and the polysemy of three words in the text, the verse generates six meanings. His claim actually was seven meanings, so the text at this point must be defective. It is full of editorial or typographic errors anyway. One can generate actually eight meanings from the shīr as given in the text. My translation brings out only one of the panoply of meanings here. One can only hope that it captures at least a small fraction of the original Persian’s felicity. Khusrau then gives another example of a shīr with seven meanings. Unfortunately, the text is even more corrupt here, and a translation is impossible.

Judging from the examples from Nizāmī and others that I quoted above, and the concerns about the ‘poetic’ qualities of poetry that we’ll see exemplified later, one could say that Khusrau’s ideas, one way or another, continued to have influence over Urdu literary thought for many centuries. While the nature of the language in which literature was being produced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was never in doubt—it was a language for the common people, different from other, pre-existing languages, and didn’t have many intellectual pretensions yet—the name of the language continued to be dual until quite late in the Deccan too.

People must have been going to and fro between the North and the South from and after the reign of Muḥammad Tuğḥlaq,

27 Khusrau, Dībāchāh-e ghurrat ul-kamāl, p. 56.
who in 1327 shifted the headquarters of the Sultanate from Delhi to the North to Daulatabad in the deep south. Although he reversed the decision in 1335, travelers' transactions between the two parts of the country continued, especially because it was the upper elite of Delhi who had been uprooted, and they naturally had large retinues. Not all of their numerous clients, pupils, camp followers went back to Delhi; some retained their connections in the south, at least for some time. These persons must have described their language as Hindī / Hindvī / Dihlavī, or Gujarī, depending on where they came from. Yet even native South-India-born speakers of the language are on record as describing their language as Gujarī. Examples can be found in the work of the South-Indian-born Sufi Shāh Burhān ud-Dīn Jānām (d.1582).28 Muḥyī ud-Dīn Qādirī Zor, a famous Dākaṇī scholar of the nineteen forties and fifties, is quoted by Jamīl Jālibī as saying, 'It is possible that the literary language of the Deccan underwent a change due to the influence of Gujarat, and people who wrote in that changed language described their language as Gujarī'.29

But this is mere speculation. Burhān ud-Dīn Janam was a substantial writer in prose and verse and must have known what he was doing. Hindvī poetry had already established a powerful presence in the South by the time of Faḵhr-e Dīn Nizāmī and Mīrānji Shams ul-Ushshāq (d.1496), the father and mentor of Burhān ud-Dīn Jānām. Mirānji describes his language as 'Hindī'. Janam describes his as both 'Gujrī' and 'Hindī', but different occasions. It is obvious that he is making a point in literary theory; in describing his language as Gujarī / Hindī, Jānām is establishing his connections with the Sufī, other-worldly, creative literary modes of the Gujarī poets, rather than with the this-worldly, essentially non-religious though didactic world of literary activity constructed by Nizāmī and his successors.

The Gujarī Sufi poet Shaikh Khūṭ Muhammad Chishti (1539-1614) was the greatest Gujarī poet, and a major poet by any consideration. He wrote his long poem (or long series of short, connected poems) called Khūṭ tarang (Excellent Wave) in 1578. In addition to being one of the greatest poems of the mystic-intellectual tradition, one strongly reminiscent of the style of Shaikh Muḥyī ud-Dīn ibn 'Arabī, Khūṭ tarang is also a poem dotted with spires of brilliant thought about the nature of poetry. For instance, he was aware of the interpenetrative transactions that were gradually building up a body of Hindī / Gujarī language and literature. Arabia and Iran were not remote or threatening father-figures, but active contributors, and the end result of these interactions is a distinct, though local, identity. He said in Khūṭ tarang:

/Like the speech
Flowing from my mouth:
Arabia and Iran join in it
To become one

The speech that flows
From the heart,
The speech of Arabia and Iran:
Listen, listen to the speech
Of Gujarat./30

Khūṭ Muhammad Chishti also wrote Chhand Chhandān (Metre and Stanzas), a verse treatise on Sanskrit and Persian prosody; in it he made an attempt to collate the two systems. The opening verse is:

/Say bismillāh, and name this
Chhand chhandan, a book
About the pingal, and 'arāż
And the tal 'adhyāyah.31

30Khūṭ Muhammad Chishti, Khūṭ tarang, pp. 247, 246. The interpretation of these two shīrīs as given in Persian by Shaikh Khūṭ Muhammad Chishti himself has been quoted by the editor, 'Ali Jafārī; see p. 183.

31The term pingal refers to Sanskrit metrical theory; 'arāţ refers to Arabo-Persian metrics and metrical theory in general; 'adhyāyah refers to the study of rhythm. For a fuller discussion see Sherānī, Maqālāt-e sherānt, vol. 1, pp. 197-200.
Shaikh Khūb Muhammad Chishti evinces the same interest in the ‘poetryness’ of verse, poetic devices, and poetic grammar, that characterises Khusrau’s literary thought. Sherami believes that Chhand chhandan revolutionised Urdu prosody and influenced the poetry and poetics of the Deccani king and poet Muhammad Quli Qutb Shāh (r.1580-1611), who was the first to put together a complete diwan in Urdu / Hindi / Dakhani.32

Maulvi Abd ul-Haq tells us about another of Khub Muhammad Chishti’s works called Bhao bhed (Mysteries of modes). Abd ul-Haq says that the Shaikh in this book discusses tropes and figures of speech, defining each figure in Persian and Gujrati, then illustrating it from his Gujrati poems. Abd ul-Haq quotes the Shaikh as saying:

I compose figures of speech and tropes, as an aid to memory, in the language of Gujarati; Dohä [in Gujrati]:

/After praising God well,
Say the Prophet’s praises. /

Now then, this monograph is named Bhao bhed, and is about different changes and decorations [possible] in poetry, and also about types of organisations of meaning.33

Khusrau and Khub Muhammad Chishti emerge as the earliest literary ideologues in Urdu. As we shall see, Chishti seems to have set the trend for literary thought in the century that followed.

Shaikh Ahmad Gujrati (b. circa 1539) wrote his longish masnavi called Yusuf zulaikhâ around 1580-1583. In it, he spoke extensively about poetry, language, and his own views about how to write poems:

/Since I had both
Natural and acquired capacity
For writing poems, I was long
In the company of learned men,

And imbibed some of their colour
Into my own being.

I spent many days learning
Syntax, many I spent
Internalising its voice, like a balance
In my own heart; many days
I spent learning grammar, whose texts
Quite conquered me. I heard
Disquisitions on the science of figures too,
And picked pearls of logic there.
My teacher taught me religious
Philosophy and mysticism;
I obtained instruction in science,
And the arts, basics of thought
And belief, and juristic texts
Also took many of my days.
I have enjoyed the essence
Of prosody, and rhyme, and worked
Hard, to internalise them. I am
Acquainted with astrology, medicine;
Having become a lover of Juice and Essence,
I have drunk deep of many such.

So many qualities one must have,
And so much learning, before
One can tell the story of a Prophet.

Telugu, and Sanskrit, I know well
And have heard poets and pundits;
I have read a lot of Persian,
And studied a bit of Arabic poetry too.34

This redoubtable inventory of skills and attainments may not have been true of all poets, but was certainly true of Shaikh Ahmad, whose reputation spread well beyond Gujarat in his own lifetime—in fact, even when he was comparatively young. The Shaikh was invited by King Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah of Golconda to be poet at court, where he arrived around 1580-81. There is little doubt that Shaikh Ahmad expected poets to be

33 Abd ul-Haq, Urdû ki ibtidâ’i nasîh o namâ meñ, pp. 67-68.
34 Ahmad Gujrati, Yusuf zulaikhâ, p. 234. The text throughout is error prone, necessitating guess-reading by me in some places.
articulate, and learned, and well versed in local as well as foreign literatures. But the list is suggestive in another, more important way: it indicates that literature in Hindvi / Gujar has now evolved to a degree of sophistication where talent needed to be both honed and widened by lateral and horizontal additions to learning. It is no longer merely an affair of the heart, driven by spontaneous impulses into song. It is a serious discipline now. Let's now hear what a poet, truly accomplished in the arts, can do:

/It's not difficult for me to compose
In all the genres of poetry there are.
I can use rare thoughts, and rare modes,
Rare and novel tropes and figures.
My Themes, auspicious, bright, would show
The Light of the sky on this
Lowly earth.

As my words fly out high, they see
This whole world as one particle.
They cleave the depth of the netherworld,
The height of the sky, unravelling them
Like the skeins of a thread.35

The Shaikh mentions allegory, imagination, metaphor, and subtlety of thought as his special qualities:

/If I were to write in the mode of metaphor
And simile, I should make a new world,
A world different from this; sometimes
I'd separate life from the living;
Sometimes I'd take away
The life of the Light of life. Sometimes
I'd show up the earth as high
As the sky, and sometimes I would
Spread out the sky like the earth.

I would depict thoughts, subtle and delicate
Like finely carded cotton.
One could see the soul of an angel,
But not my thoughts.

I thought, if I could find the poems
Made by Khusrau or Nizam, I
should quickly put them
Into Hindvi. So one day a friend
Lent me Jami's Yasiuf zulaikha,
And I began to do it
In the Hindvi tongue, with strong metre,
And similes, and tropes, and figures.
I should not be Jami's slave, but follow him
In some places, and not follow him
In some. I should extract whatever
Poetry Jami had, and add some of my own.

I should bring in fewer
Arabic words in the tale, nor mix
Persian and Arabic overmuch.
I shouldn't elide, or twist words
To fit the metre, nor write
Incoherently.36

It is obvious that Persian, or Arabic, or Sanskrit, are not seen by the poet as large, hegemonic figures in or around whose shadow he is obliged to work. Sanskrit, Telugu, Arabic, Persian, are all grist to his mill, and he is not in awe of, or inclined to privilege, any particular linguistic tradition. He won't bring in too much Arabic; he won't mix a lot of Persian into Arabic. He acknowledges Khusrau and Nizam and Jami, but is quite prepared to improve upon Jami, take the kernel and leave the husk. He will follow Jami in some places, in some he will not do so. He regards the indigenous language that he is working in as having a literary and linguistic milieu of its own, with no need to be propped up by foreign importations.

Poetry, for Shaikh Ahmad, is the business of creating new worlds, reversing the order of things so as to make them anew. While his general debt to Arabic and Sanskrit poetics is obvious, it is hard to pinpoint exactly where the influence or the debt lies. Rather, there is an air of assimilation, an indirect intimation of connections and continuities. Like Khusrau in his Preface, Shaikh Ahmad is constructing not so much from the

35*Ahmad Gujrati, Yasiuf zulaikha, p. 235.*

36*Ahmad Gujrati, Yasiuf zulaikha, p. 237.*
past, as for the benefit of the present and the future. Anticipations of the 'Indian style' (sabk-i hindi) of Persian poetry can be seen. Such anticipations are not dominant yet, but are clearly the single most prominent element in the Shaikh's poetics.

Consider, for example, his emphasis on abstract, subtle thought, the centrality of metaphor, the global reach of the imagination, and the value he puts on figures of speech. All these are characteristics of the Indian style. And it's no wonder that all of these were firmly rejected by the protagonists of the 'modern, reformist' movement in literature three centuries later.

Shaikh Ahmad's concern for the language—avoiding too much Arabic and Persian, not distorting pronunciation to suit the metre, not resorting to elisions or compressions—indicates a maturity and stabilisation of linguistic usage. But this was perhaps more in theory than practice, for Gujri and Dakan poets are notoriously free with pronunciation, keeping it firmly subservient to the exigencies of metre, or maybe even to ad hominem, topical decisions. Often the same word is pronounced in two or three ways in the same text within a brief space, making metrical reading extremely difficult. Yet the theoretical interest evinced by the Shaikh in keeping a 'standard' pronunciation intact suggests the faint beginnings of what in the late nineteenth century became an obsession with 'purity' and 'correctness' in language.

Vajhi, writing his masnavi called Qub mushurdi some twenty-five years later (1609-10), shows this concern more strongly:

/One who has no sense of coherence
In speech should have nothing to do
With writing poems. And one should not
Have the greed to say too much, either.
If said well, even one single verse
Will suffice. If you have the Art,
Use finesse and subtlety. For
One does not stuff bags full with colour.
The difficult part of the art of poetry
Is to make both word and meaning
Coincide. Use only such words

In your poems as have been used
By none but the masters.
If you knew the grammar
Of poetry, you would use
Hand-picked words, lofty themes.
Even if there's but one powerful theme,
It enhances the pleasure of the speech.
If your beloved is beautiful like the sun,
And if you further beautify her face,
It is like Light upon Light. Even if
A woman had a thousand flaws,
She would look good if she knew
The art of self-adornment.37

One can see a number of new things happening here. In addition to Shaikh Ahmad's interest in words and their correctness in usage, Vajhi is also interested in the ustād or master-poet's parole. The use of words not used by the ustāds is not to be encouraged. Then there is the special value placed on beauty of speech for its own sake. A fine theme is doubly valuable if well expressed, but even a poor theme gains substantial beauty if expressed with elan and style. Vajhi also proposes the notion of sāhityah (equality of words and meaning), and the idea that poetry is an exercise in words.

Vajhi died about 1660, leaving Gujri / Hindvi / Dakani able to boast a fully fledged literature in prose and verse. The Gujri impulse also reached its peak with Shaikh Khub Muhammad Chishti (1539-1614). The literary theory that provided meaning and justification to the praxis of the previous two and a half centuries can be said to have been summed up by Sanati Bijapuria in his masnavi, Qissah-e benazir (Peerless story, 1644-45). Sanati doesn't seem to have added anything substantial of his own to the ongoing construction of the poetics for Hindvi literature, but he did say some interesting things about the language that he used. His remarks have almost a normative force:

/I did not put much of Sanskrit in it.

37Vajhi, Qub mushurdi, pp. 53-54.
I kept the poem free
Of verbosity. Dakhanī comes
Easy to one who doesn’t have Persian.
For it has the content of Sanskrit, but
With a flavour of ease. Having made it easy
In the Dakhanī, I put into it
Tens and scores of prominent
And elegant devices. 38

It follows that for Ṣan‘atī, poems should have an indigenous
air, with neither too much Sanskrit, nor too much Persian. But
there is still room for elegant and noticeable devices, and fine
artifice. Poetry for Ṣan‘atī is the soul and apogee of all human
endeavour. It does not need ratification from outside authority.
Nor does the poetics genuflect before the ancients, Sanskrit and
Perso-Arabic. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about early
Urdu literary theory is its air of independence.

This tradition of independent thought continued in the South
until its last great classical writer, Maulānā Bāqar Āghā (1746-
1808). In the Preface to his maṣnawi called Gulzār-e ‘ishq
(Love’s Garden, 1794), Āghā regretted that ‘some persons [in
the North]’ regarded Nuṣraṭī as inferior to Saudā, while in
actual fact, Nuṣraṭī excelled not only over Saudā but also over
the Persians:

...Saudā gained prominent credit among all Rekhtah poets...he is
sought after by people everywhere from the North to
Karnataka...Some go to such an extent in eulogising him that they
regard that poor fellow as better, and greater, than all Rekhtah
poets, or rather, all Persian writers. And what arrogance! And how
astonishing, that they don’t acknowledge Nuṣraṭī, the King of
Poets, and do not know the value of his magic, permitted [even
under the law of God]. Their major evidence is that Nuṣraṭī’s
language is imperfect and not smooth [that is, not according to
the idiom of Delhi]....They don’t realize that meaning [theme] is the
soul of brilliant composition, and word is just a borrowed raiment
for it. Let anyone...who knows something of literary evaluation

and understanding...make a careful selection from the Kulliyât of
Saudā, and let him compare the result with just one narrative [by
Nuṣraṭī], Gulshan-e ‘ishq, or ‘All nāmah,...and then, let him leave
Saudā, but compare [the poems of Nuṣraṭī mentioned above] with
any Persian poet, whether in the [genre of] qaṣīdah or maṣnawi.39

Bāqar Āghā may not have been quite right in thinking that
‘meaning’ (theme) is the ‘soul’ of poetry and words are merely
its dress. But his idea can easily find support from many subtle
and elaborate discussions on the nature of language and the
theory of translation. ‘Abd ul-Qāhir Jurjānī has some extremely
illuminating things to say on this subject. But my purpose in
quoting here from Bāqar Āghā is to show that even though he
wrote in a time when the Delhi idiom and manner of poetry had
practically dislodged the Dakhanī idiom and manner from its
previous position of eminence, Āghā did not regard himself,
and the Dakhanī tradition, as slavishly bound to be judged in
terms of the new canon that was developing in the North. He
had no doubt that the great and current popularity of Saudā
notwithstanding, Nuṣraṭī was the greater poet.

In spite of the strong position taken by Āghā, the literary
chauvinists of Delhi, of whom Mīr was the primal leader, grew
in strength from decade to decade. Today, there would be
hardly anyone in the North who would insist on Nuṣraṭī’s being
given a place among the greatest Urdu poets.

39Bāqar Āghā, Maulānā bāqar āghā ke adabī navādir, pp. 144-
146.

38Quoted in Jālibī, Tūrtīkh-e adab-e urdā, vol. 1, p. 273. Note that
while Vaj’hi calls his language ‘Hindi’, Ṣan‘atī calls it ‘Dakhani.’ He
sets Dakhanī up in opposition and opposition to Persian, as Khūb
Muhammad Chishtī did for Gujūr.