

Chapter Four: The Birth of Literary Theory

The most prominent feature of *Kadam rāḥ padam rāḥ* is its secularity. It has a moral of sorts, but it is basically a poem about kingcraft, miscegenation, 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 Ḳhusrau in his Preface to *Ġhurrat ul-kamāl* (1294) described himself as the inventor of a special kind of *īhām* (a highly evolved kind of punning) in poetry.² It must also be noted that Faḵhr-e Dīn Niẓāmī's advent is parallel to, and quite independent of, Shaiḵh Bājan's. The first stirrings of literary theory that we see in Niẓāmī's poem suggest that Hindī / Hindvī 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 Ḳhusrau'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. Niẓāmī's stress on *īhām*, quoted above, should certainly owe something to Ḳhusrau's precept and example.

Ḳhusrau'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 (†Alī Aḥmad Saʿīd) says that early Arab critics

¹Niẓāmī, *Kadam rāḥ padam rāḥ*, p. 133.

²Ḳhusrau, *Dībāchah-e ḡhurrat ul-kamāl*, pp. 63-64.

‘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’.³

This is clearly a good working description of *ravānī*, but Ḳhusrau 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 *sahrīdaya* reader of poetry.

In the Preface to his *Kulliyāt* (Collected Poems), which he seems to have compiled after *Baqiyah-e naqiyah* (The Clear Residue), his next-to-last *dīvān* (c.1315), Ḳhusrau discussed and graded his four *dīvāns* 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 *dīvān Tuḥfāt us-ṣiḡhar* (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 *Ġhurrat 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 expound 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

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

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 steely 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 *Baqiyah-e naqiyah* (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.⁴

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 Khusrau 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-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 *ravānī* 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 *ravānī* by appealing to people who have the proper temperament or nature. He uses the word *ṭabṭ*, the standard word in Persian / Arabic for the poet's 'temperament'. For example, *ṭabṭ-e ravānī* means 'the ability, the disposition, to compose fluently'. Of the many senses of *ṭabṭ* 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 *ṭabṭ-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 *ṭabṭ-e vaqqād* to enable him to make poems, the reader should have *ṭabṭ-e vaqqād* to see and

⁴Khusrau, *Kulliyāt*, 1967 ed., pp. 39-40. I have also before me the Naval Kishor Press, Kanpur, edition of 1916, corrected (=edited) by Ḥāmid Shāhābādī. Neither edition is very satisfactory, making it necessary for me to guess-read in at least one place.

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 *ravānī* 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 *ravānī*; on the contrary, it would be dense and brittle. Khusrau uses the words *kašīf* and *nāzuk*, which I translate as ‘dense’ and ‘brittle’, respectively. In Arabic and Persian, *kašīf* has a generally unfavourable sense: soiled, especially with dirt, or grease, etc. But there is a sense of teemingness too. So a *kašīf* object is dense, too full of things. Its opposite is *laṭīf*, ‘delicate, light, soft, subtle’. So the *kašīf* 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 *kašīf*-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 *ravānī* to more *ravānī*. Khusrau builds upon this notion throughout the passages under discussion. Consider the following images: ghazals of the second *dīvān* are like ‘water that has boiled over due to the fire in its nature’. Those of the third *dīvān* are ‘roasted and baked’, they have the ‘energy’ of the fiery temperament when it’s not flying high. Ghazals of the fourth *dīvān* 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 *ravānī*--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-jauzāʾ*, which means, ‘a black sheep the middle 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

⁵Tewary, *A Critical Approach*, p. 33.

⁶Khusrau, *Kulliyāt*, 1916 ed., p. 3; 1967 ed., p. 39.

constellation in question has stars brighter than those in other constellations, it was called *jauzāʾ*.⁷ Indians call it *maithun*, which means ‘sexual intercourse’.⁸ 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-ʾazrāʾ*, 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 *qaṣīdah* by the great Iranian poet Kḥāqānī 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 Kḥāqānī 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

⁷Ghiyās ud-Dīn Rāmpūrī, *Ghiyās ul-luġhāt*, p. 146.

⁸McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, p. 834.

⁹Kḥāqānī Sharvānī, *Anmuzāj ul-maʿānī*, pp. 101-02.

the fire of the imagination whose essence is motion (*ravānī*). In Ḳhāqānī'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 *dabīr-e falak* (secretary to the heavens; *dabīr* 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 Ḳhusrau'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: *ḳhushah* as constellation, ear of corn, the creative heart of the poet as a harvesting place; *āb* as water, brilliance; thus the light of the sun turning into water is also 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 Ḳhusrau'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 *ravānī* and energy of light waves and water waves.¹⁰

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

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

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

¹¹Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī, *Dīvān-e ḥāfiẓ*, p. 135. Doubts exist whether this *shīr* is actually by Ḥāfiẓ. It doesn't appear in many of the more authoritative editions of Ḥāfiẓ, while it does find a place in many others, and has long been attributed to him. What is important is the fact that Ḥāfiẓ is believed to have held an opinion about *ravānī*, and

Nearer home, Urdu poets in the Deccan, building upon the theme of *ravānī*, took the next step in syntagmatic image-making, and introduced the imagery of the ocean, and of pearls in it. Shaiḫ Aḥmad Gujrātī, in his *maṣnavī* called *Yūsuf zulaikḥā* (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
To rain down pearls/.¹²

Mullā Vaj'hī (d.1659?), in his long poem *Quṭb mushtarī* (1609-10), builds further upon Shaiḫ Aḥmad'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 Bījāpūrī (1600-1674) praising his poet-king ʿAlī ʿĀdil Shāh (r.1656-1672) in his long poem *ʿAlī nāmāh* 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:

gave *ravānī* as much importance as Ḳhusrau did.

¹²Aḥmad Gujrātī, *Yūsuf zulaikḥā*, p. 215.

¹³Vaj'hī, *Quṭb mushtarī*, p. 56.

¹⁴Nuṣratī Bījāpūrī, *ʿAlī nāmāh*, p. 27.

/Let my thoughts fly high, like the winds,
To my temperament, give
The ocean's perpetual wave and flow/.¹⁵

Nuṣratī also spoke in this poem of *mazmūn* (theme), as opposed to *maʿnī* (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/.¹⁶

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 divers 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 Shākir 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
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/.¹⁷

Perhaps the most powerful single component in the matrix of Muslim literary ideas and practice is the Qurʾān, which is believed to be uncreated, and yet is a miracle of textual creation. Poetry therefore tried to approximate to this miracle. Literary criticism

¹⁵Nuṣratī Bījāpūrī, *ʿAlī nāmāh*, p. 10.

¹⁶Valī Dakanī, *Kulliyāt-e valī*, p. 239.

¹⁷Nājī, *Dīvān-e shākir nājī*, p. 342.

began among the Muslims with exegeses of the Qurʾān dealing with the beauties of the Qurʾānic language. Even Ibn ul-Muʿtazz, writing in 887 his ground-breaking *Kitāb ul-badīʿ* (The Book of New Beauties), declared that *badīʿ* (verbal devices) had always been there in the discourse of the Arabs and the Qurʾān, except for the somewhat artificial quality of ‘dialectical argument’ found in modern poetry.

Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych quite properly identifies the pre-Islamic *qaṣīdah* and the Qurʾān as ‘the twin foundations of Arab-Islamic literary culture’. She goes on to say that just as the Qurʾānic text was held to be inimitable, its poetry ‘was considered to be of a quality unattainable by the poets of the Islamic period’.¹⁸ The Qurʾān 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 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 Qurʾān, 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 Qurʾān, and thus if anyone said that poetry was not in the Praised and Exalted Book, he denied the Qurʾān’.²⁰ Since the Qurʾān was, again by definition, also the most beautiful text, it was proper to place both the mind and heart of poetry in the Qurʾānic context. This great theoretical leap was made by Khusrau in the *Dībāchah*

¹⁸Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, p. xi.

¹⁹Many of these positions were developed or elaborated by ʾAbd ul-Qāhir Jurjānī (d.1078) in his *Dalāʾil ul-iʿjāz* (Proofs for the Miracle) and *Asrār ul-balāghat* (The secrets of *balāghat*). 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*.

²⁰Khusrau, *Dībāchah-e ghurrat ul-kamāl*, p. 20.

(Preface) to his third *dīvān*, *Ġhurrat 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 (*ʿilm*) in both word and spirit. In word, because the Qurʾān tells us *wa hum lā yashʿurūn*, that is, *wa hum lā yaʿlamūn*.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 Qurʾān, ‘wisdom’ (*ḥikmat*) has been used clearly in the sense of ‘knowledge’ (*ʿilm*), as follows: ‘And he to whom wisdom / Is granted receiveth / Indeed a benefit overflowing’.²² Here, ‘wisdom’ means ‘knowledge’. Thus, according to this, ‘poet’ means ‘one who knows’ [a person of wisdom and learning], and a wise person who is also a poet, would, by God, be the greatest of wise men! Going back to this Tradition, ‘Undoubtedly wisdom is from poetry and undoubtedly magic is from discourse,’²³ we find a genealogical tree for the magic of poetry which rises higher than the *sidrah* and *tūbā* [trees of paradise], because that nightingale of the garden of *mā zāgh*²⁴ has

²¹‘They have no awareness’ and ‘They do not know.’ The Arabic word for poetry, *shiʿr*, is from the root *shīn*, *ʿain*, *rā*, from which one gets *shaʿar*, ‘to know, to be sensible [of something],’ and *shuʿūr*, ‘consciousness beyond the ordinary’ (see Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qurʾan*, p. 80; and ʿAbd ul-Ḥafīz Balliyāvī, *Miṣbāḥ ul-luġhāt*, p. 411). Khusrau takes advantage of the common root *shiʿr* and claims, plausibly enough, that since *yashʿurūn* means the same as *yaʿlamūn*, poetry (*shiʿr*) and knowledge (*ʿilm*) are the same.

²²Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, 2:69, p. 109.

²³Imām Buḫḫārī records only the first part of this Tradition. Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal records it in full, though without the intensifier *lām* which occurs before both *ḥikmat* and *shiʿr* 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.

Navāb Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Ḳhān (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 *tazkirah*, *Shamʿe anjuman*. 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]’ (Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Ḳhān, *Shamʿe anjuman*, pp. 17-18).

²⁴The nightingale of the garden of *mā zāgh* signifies the Prophet Muḥammad. It is a beautiful pun involving a Qurʾānic phrase (53:17) about the Prophet: ‘His sight never swerved / Nor did it go wrong’

determined poetry to be the root, and wisdom to be its branch. Who can 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'?²⁵ 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 from discourse, not discourse from magic. Thus a poet can be described as a magician, but a magician cannot be described as a poet.²⁶

Ḳhusrau'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 Ḳhusrau'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 Ḳhusrau'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 *Dībāchah-e ḡhurrat ul-kamāl*:

Before now, the tongue of the poets, which is the hair-dresser and adorer of poetry, did hair-splitting in *ṭhām* such that two subtle points resulted. This servant, by his sharp pen, split the point of the hair of meaning such that seven subtle points were obtained from one hair....In brief, if in times before, the image presented by *ṭhām* had two faces, and whoever looked [at the *ṭhām*] was astonished, Ḳhusrau's temperament has devised an *ṭhām* having more

(trans. by Abdullah Yusuf Ali). Since this verse is God's praise for the Prophet, Ḳhusrau imagines the whole verse (signalled in his text by the first two words, *mā zāḡh*), as a garden of which Muḥammad is the nightingale. Since in Persian, *mā* means 'we, us', and *zāḡh* means 'crow', and there are many tree metaphors in the passage, the pun becomes extremely complex and delightfully piquant.

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

²⁶Ḳhusrau, *Dībāchah-e ḡhurrat ul-kamāl*, pp. 18-19. A good discussion of some of Ḳhusrau's ideas on this can be found in Jamāl Ḥusain, '*Dībāchah-e ḡhurrat ul-kamāl kī maḥnaviyat*'.

reflectivity than the mirror. For in the mirror, there is only one image, and it cannot show more than one idea. Yet this [*īhām* 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 Sīmurgh in mortal combat
Were you to set, oh massive-headed
Lion, your falcon to hunt/.²⁷

Ḳhusrau 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. Ḳhusrau 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 Ḳhusrau'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 of 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 Tuḡhlaq, who in 1327 shifted the headquarters of the Sultanate from Delhi in the North to Daulatabad in the deep south. Although he reversed the decision in 1335, travellers' 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 Gujrī, depending on where they came from. Yet even native south-India-born speakers of the language are on record as describing their language as Gujrī. Examples can be found in the work of the South-Indian-

²⁷Ḳhusrau, *Dībāchah-e ḡhurrat ul-kamāl*, p. 56.

born Sufi Shāh Burhān ud-Dīn Jānam (d.1582?).²⁸ Muḥyi ud-Dīn Qādirī Zor, a famous Dakanī 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 Gujrī’.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 Faḫr-e Dīn Nizāmī and Mīrānjī Shams ul-ʿUshshāq (d.1496), the father and mentor of Burhān ud-Dīn Jānam. Mīrānjī describes his language as ‘Hindī’. Janam describes his as both ‘Gujrī’ and ‘Hindī’, on different occasions. It is obvious that he is making a point in literary theory: in describing his language as Gujrī / Hindī, Jānam is establishing his connections with the Sufi, other-worldly, creative literary modes of the Gujrī poets, rather than with the this-worldly, essentially non-religious though didactic world of literary activity constructed by Nizāmī and his successors.

The Gujrati Sufi poet Shaikh Ḳhūb Muḥammad Chishtī (1539-1614) was the greatest Gujrī poet, and a major poet by any consideration. He wrote his long poem (or long series of short, connected poems) called *Ḳhub 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 Muḥyi ud-Dīn ibn ʿArabī, *Ḳhub 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 / Gujrī 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 *Ḳhub 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

²⁸Jālibī, *Tārīkh-e adab-e urdū*, vol. 1, p. 129.

²⁹Jālibī, *Tārīkh-e adab-e urdū*, vol. 1, p. 69.

³⁰Ḳhūb Muḥammad Chishtī, *Ḳhub tarang*, pp. 247, 246. The interpretation of these two *shīʿrs* as given in Persian by Shaikh Ḳhūb Muḥammad Chishtī himself has been quoted by the editor, ʿAlī Jaʿfarī;

Ḳhūb Muḥammad Chishtī also wrote *Chhand Chhandāñ* (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 *ḥarūz*
 And the *tāl adhyāyah*!.³¹

Shaiḳh Ḳhūb Muḥammad Chishtī evinces the same interest in the ‘poetryness’ of verse, poetic devices, and poetic grammar, that characterises Ḳhusrau’s literary thought. Sherānī believes that *Chhand chhandan* revolutionised Urdu prosody and influenced the poetry and poetics of the Deccani king and poet Muḥammad Qulī Quṭb Shāh (r.1580-1611), who was the first to put together a complete *dīvān* in Urdu / Hindī / Dakanī.³²

Maulvī Abd ul-Ḥaq tells us about another of Ḳhūb Muḥammad Chishtī’s works called *Bhāḥo bhed* (Mysteries of modes). †Abd ul-Ḥaq says that the Shaiḳh in this book discusses tropes and figures of speech, defining each figure in Persian and Gujrī, then illustrating it from his Gujrī poems. †Abd ul-Ḥaq quotes the Shaiḳh as saying:

I compose figures of speech and tropes, as an aid to memory, in the language of Gujarat; Dohā [in Gujrī]:

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

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

Ḳhusrau and Ḳhūb Muḥammad Chishtī emerge as the earliest literary ideologues in Urdu. As we shall see, Chishtī seems to have set the trend for literary thought in the century that followed.

Shaiḳh Aḥmad Gujrātī (b.circa 1539) wrote his longish *maṣnavī* called *Yūsuf zulaikḥā* around 1580-1585. 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

see p. 183.

³¹The term *pingal* refers to Sanskrit metrical theory; *ḥarūz* refers to Arabo-Persian metrics and metrical theory in general; *tāl adhyāyah* refers to the study of rhythm. For a fuller discussion see Sherānī, *Maqālāt-e sherānī*, vol. 1, pp. 197-200.

³²Sherānī, *Maqālāt-e sherānī*, vol. 1, pp. 199-200.

³³†Abd ul-Ḥaq, *Urdū kī ibtidāʿ nashv o namā meñ*, pp. 67-68.

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 Aḥmad, whose reputation spread well beyond Gujarat in his own lifetime--in fact, even when he was comparatively young. The Shaikh was invited by King Muḥammad Qulī Quṭb Shāh of Golconda to be poet at court, where he arrived around 1580-81. There is little doubt that Shaikh Aḥmad expected poets to be 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 Hindvī / Gujrī 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:

³⁴Aḥmad Gujrātī, *Yusuf zulaikḥā*, p. 234. The text throughout is error prone, necessitating guess-reading by me in some places.

/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 Shaiḵh 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 Ḳhusrau or Niḏāmī,
 I should quickly put them
 Into Hindvī. So one day a friend
 Lent me Jāmī's *Yūsuf zulaikḥā*,
 And I began to do it
 In the Hindvī tongue, with strong metre,
 And similes, and tropes, and figures.
 I should not be Jāmī's slave, but follow him
 In some places, and not follow him
 In some. I should extract whatever
 Poetry Jāmī 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

³⁵Aḥmad Gujrātī, *Yūsuf zulaikḥā*, p. 235.

³⁶Aḥmad Gujrātī, *Yūsuf zulaikḥā*, p. 237.

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 Nizāmī and Jāmī, but is quite prepared to improve upon Jāmī, take the kernel and leave the husk. He will follow Jāmī 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 Aḥmad, 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 Aḥmad is constructing not so much from the past, as for the benefit of the present and the future. Anticipations of the 'Indian style' (*sabk-i hindī*) 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 Aḥmad'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 Gujrī and Dakanī 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.

Vaj'hī, writing his *maṣnavī* called *Quṭb mushtarī* 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 Aḥmad's interest in words and their correctness in usage, Vaj'hī 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. Vaj'hī also proposes the notion of *sāhityah* (equality of words and meaning), and the idea that poetry is an exercise in words.

Vaj'hī died about 1660, leaving Gujrī / Hindvī / Dakanī able to boast a fully fledged literature in prose and verse. The Gujrī impulse also reached its peak with Shaikh Khūb Muḥammad Chishtī (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 Ṣan'atī Bījāpūrī in his *maṣnavī*, *Qiṣṣah-e benaṣīr* (Peerless story, 1644-45). Ṣan'atī doesn't seem to have added anything substantial of his own to the ongoing construction of the poetics for Hindvī 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.
 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

³⁷Vaj'hī, *Quṭb mushtarī*, pp. 53-54.

In the Dakhanī, I put into it
Tens and scores of prominent
And elegant devices/.³⁸

It follows that for Ṣanʿatī, 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 Ṣanʿatī 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 Āgāh (1746-1808). In the Preface to his *maṣnavī* called *Gulzār-e ʿīshq* (Love's Garden, 1794), Āgāh regretted that 'some persons [in the North]' regarded Nuṣratī as inferior to Saudā, while in actual fact, Nuṣratī excelled not only over Saudā but also over the Persians:

...Saudā gained prominent credit among all Reḳhtah 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 Reḳhtah poets, or rather, all Persian writers. And what arrogance! And how astonishing, that they don't acknowledge Nuṣratī, 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 Nuṣratī'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 *Kulliyāt* of Saudā, and let him compare the result with just one narrative [by Nuṣratī], *Gulshan-e ʿīshq*, or *ʿĀlī nāmah*,...and then, let him leave Saudā, but compare [the poems of Nuṣratī mentioned above] with any Persian poet, whether in the [genre of] *qaṣīdah* or *maṣnavī*.³⁹

Bāqar Āgāh 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. ʿAbd ul-Qāhir Jurjānī has some extremely illuminating things to say on this subject. But my purpose in quoting here from Bāqar Āgāh is to show that even though he wrote in a time when the Delhi idiom and manner of poetry had practically dislodged the

³⁸Quoted in Jālibī, *Tārīkh-e adab-e urdū*, vol. 1, p. 273. Note that while Vaj'hī calls his language 'Hindī', Ṣanʿatī calls it 'Dakhanī.' He sets Dakhanī up in opposition and apposition to Persian, as Ḳhūb Muḥammad Chishtī did for Gujrī.

³⁹Bāqar Āgāh, *Maulānā bāqar āgāh ke adabī navādir*, pp. 144-146.

Dakanī idiom and manner from its previous position of eminence, Āgāh did not regard himself, and the Dakanī 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, Nuṣratī was the greater poet.

In spite of the strong position taken by Āgāh, 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 Nuṣratī's being given a place among the greatest Urdu poets.