If the prestige and popularity of Persian retarded the growth of Hindī / Rekhtah literature in the North, the influence and power of the Indian-style Persian poetry nevertheless had salubrious effects on Rekhtah / Hindī poetry and theory when Rekhtah / Hindī came into its own in Delhi in the late 1600’s. Shāh Mubārak Ābru (1683/5-1733) is the first major poet in Delhi in the new century. He must have begun writing poetry late in the seventeenth century, and is generally regarded as having adopted ḥām extremely early in his career. We have seen Khusrau claiming to be the inventor of a highly elaborate kind of ḥām in poetry. But the immediate influence on Ābru seems to have been Sanskrit through Braj Bhāshā and ‘Indian-style’ Persian poetry. Even Muḥammad Ḥusain Azād, who blamed Urdu poetry for being too Iran-oriented, acknowledged that ḥām must have come into Urdu poetry from the Sanskrit.29 Ābru, and indeed whoever entered upon the business of poetry in Dakānī / Hindī / Rekhtah in the early eighteenth century, came under the influence of Valī, and in many ways Valī has been the poet of all Urdu poets since the first decade of the eighteenth century.

29Āzād, Ab-e Ḥayāt, p. 99. It should be noted that Ābru came from Gwalior, an important area in the geography of Braj Bhāsha.
Chapter Six:
A Phenomenon Called ‘Valî’

According to an estimate in 1966, there were extant at that time sixty-five dated manuscripts, and fifty-three undated manuscripts, of Valî’s divân in libraries and similar collections. In addition, there were thirty-three manuscript anthologies that contained substantial selections from Valî. Nūr ul-Ḥasan Hāshmî, the leading Valî expert of our time, says that these numbers, though huge by ordinary standards, are still less than the actual corpus of Valî’s extant manuscripts. For example, he says, the inventory of 1966 records only one manuscript divân at the Asiatic Society Calcutta; actually, there are two there. The Khuda Bakhsh Library at Patna has four, the Raza Library at Rampur has two, and the State Archives of U.P. library at Allahabad has one; these manuscripts of Valî’s divâns are not recorded in the 1966 list. Hashmi himself has two, and there are others in other private collections. (Prof. Shamīm Ḥanafi of Jamia Millia University, New Delhi, recently told me that he has a beautifully illuminated manuscript of Valî’s poetry that seems to be from the early eighteenth century.) Thus a really full list of substantial manuscripts of Valî could itself be the size of a whole book.¹

Valî was born around 1665/7 and he died most probably in 1707-08. However, dates as disparate as 1720-25, and even 1735, have been proposed as the actual time of his death. In fact, determining a late date for Valî’s death is a political, rather than scholarly, issue. For one of the most famous stories about Valî is that he was advised by Shāh Gulshan, a saint and poet who lived in Delhi, to adopt the style and the themes of

the Persians. Thus the longer Valī lived after Shāh Gulshan’s putative advice to him to follow the Persians and give up Dakānī ways, the greater the chance of his poetry’s being proved to be Persian / Delhi inspired, thus reducing by that much Valī’s status as an original poet who influenced the poets of Delhi.  

Zahīr ud-Dīn Badānī gives Valī’s date of death as 4 Sha‘bān, 1119 hijrī, and says that the year corresponds to 1709. This is quite clearly incorrect. The date ‘4 Sha‘bān 1119’ corresponds to October 31, 1707. Badānī doesn’t give the source for ‘4 Sha‘bān’, but the year is based on a famous and—naturally—much-disputed Persian chronogram that gives the date of the death of a person called Valī as 1119. Badānī quotes the chronogram too, so we may regard the 1709 mentioned in Badānī’s text as a typographical error. The year 1707–08 seems to be the most likely as Valī’s year of death, because the oldest extant manuscript of his dīvān is dated 26

2Jāmil Jālibī has a long discussion aiming to show that Valī died around 1720–25. Some of his arguments are: if Valī died so soon after his meeting with Shāh Gulshan, how did he complete a sizable dīvān [in the ‘new’ style]? Valī’s friends and peers, and Shāh Gulshan himself, lived until long after 1700, so how could Valī not have done the same? (See Tārīkh-e adab-e urdu, vol. 1, pp. 534–39.)

Interesting evidence of Delhi’s continuing bias against Valī is provided by the letters of Ḥabīb ur-Rahmān al-Ṣiddīqī Merathi, who was a man of erudition and came from an ancient and distinguished family of Meerut. In a letter to Zakā Ṣiddīqī dated August 15, 1667, he wrote, ‘Valī has been given too much of a boost; he needs to be debunked’ (italicized words in English in the original). Two weeks later he wrote to the same correspondent, ‘Valī learned [proper] Urdu when he came to Delhi; it’s not that he taught [proper] Urdu to the people of Delhi’. It should be noted that al-Ṣiddīqī regarded his own speech as that of Delhi. In October 1667 he wrote to Zakā Ṣiddīqī, ‘My problem is that I’ve forgotten Dihlavi, and I never did master Dakānī’ (Ḥabīb ur-Rahmān al-Ṣiddīqī, Makārib-e siddīqī, pp. 153, 155, 160).  

Ismat Javed, in his ‘Valī kā sāl-e vyāfāt’, has refuted Jālibī’s arguments about Valī’s date of death.

3Madāni, Sukhkuvār t-e gujarāt, p. 86.
a strong ambivalence about him, and acknowledged their debt to him in equivocal language:

/Abūr, your poetry is
Like a Prophet’s miracle,
And Valī’s, like the miracle
Of a mere saint.  

/Were someone to go and recite
Naṣīr’s verse on Valī’s grave,
Valī would rip open his own shroud
And spring from his resting place
Crying, ‘Well said!’

/Ḥātim is not all that insufficient
To give peace to my heart,
Yet Valī is the true Prince
Of poetry in this world.

In Persian poetry, [Ḥātim] is a follower of Šā‘ib, and in Rekhtah, considers Valī the ustād.

Zafar Aḥmad Ṣiddīqī, in his essay ‘Abūr kā ṭāmā’, quotes two shīr’s from a longish poem—a tarjī band—of Abūr’s that seem to him freely to acknowledge Valī as his model and mentor. Actually, the acknowledgment is not all that free, and can be read even as a tentative assertion of independence:

/Valī is Master in Rekhtah,
So who can write
An answer to him?

Yet, to write with
Diligent care and search
Gives success, given

4Abūr, Divān-e ābrū, p. 271.
5Naṣīr, Divān-e shākir nājī, p. 349.
6Shāh Ḥātim, Intiḥāb-e kalām-e ḥātim, p. 58.
7See Shāh Ḥātim’s own preface to his Divān zādah (compiled in 1755-56), p. 39.

A little inspiration.  

‘Diligent care and search’ is my translation of tātabbūf, which is Arabic for ‘following after, diligently and carefully searching.’ In modern Urdu, tātabbūf almost always means ‘to follow after’, but this meaning was not so well established in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while the meaning ‘diligently and carefully searching’ was reasonably well known even in the early twentieth century. Mir uses tabīyāt meh (from the same root, tâ, bâ, ‘aîn) to mean ‘following after, imitating’.  

Note that Abūr says se (‘with’), and not meh (‘in’), tātabbūf. Even if we translate tātabbūf as ‘imitation, following after’, we have ‘inspiration’ and ‘imagination’ to contend with in the next shīr. ‘Inspiration’ is faiz (literally, ‘flow’), and ‘imagination’ is fikr (literally, ‘thought’). The former is vouchsafed by God, perhaps through a mediator, and the latter is innate. So all in all, the two shīrs are handsom enough as a tribute, but can hardly be called unequivocal in their acknowledgment of Valī’s superiority.

We thus see that Shah Ḥātim, most generous of poets, is the only one whose tribute to Valī is not left-handed. The later masters, particularly Mir (1722-1810) and Qā’in Chāndpūrī (1724/25-1794), took the lead in belittling the achievement of Valī by introducing the story of Sa’dullāh Gulshan’s advising Valī to ‘appropriate’ themes and images from the Persians, and thus enrich his own poetry. In sum, the story is as follows:

1. Valī came to Delhi in 1700 and met Gulshan, who advised him as above.
2. Valī apparently took the advice seriously and implemented it successfully.
3. When his divān arrived in Delhi in the second regnal year of Emperor Muhammad Shāh [the second regnal year began in October 1720], it took Delhi by storm, and everybody, young or old, adopted Valī’s style of poetry.

8Abūr, Divān-e ābrū, p. 295.
9Mir, Kulliyāt, p. 711.
The first assumption is based on Qā'īm’s statement that Valī came to Delhi in Aurangzeb’s forty-fourth regnal year. Since Aurangzeb came to the throne in 1068/1658, forty-four hijrī years bring us to 1112, which commenced in July 1700. Since there are no suggestions or indications to the contrary, it is quite safe to accept this date. There is fairly firm ground for accepting the third assumption, since it is supported by Muṣḥaf who heard the facts from Shāh Ḥātim, an eyewitness. Muṣḥafī says in his Tażkīrah-e hindī (completed 1794-95): ‘One day he [Shāh Ḥātim] mentioned to this faqir that in the second regnal year of him who rests in Paradise, Valī’s dīvān arrived in Shāhjahānābād, and its verses became current on the tongues of young and old’.

By ‘him who rests in Paradise’ is meant Muḥammad Shāh, who ascended the throne of Delhi on September 30, 1719, and ruled until his death in 1748. What Ḥātim said to Muṣḥafī about Valī is just about the most that anyone can say by way of tribute to an older poet, particularly one who came from outside. But Ḥātim wrote no tażkīrah, and Delhi’s chauvinism found a smoke-screen in Shāh Gulshan, a minor Persian poet and Sufi from Būhānpur, which was then a part of Gujarat. He spent his time between Būhānpur and Delhi. The first tażkīrah of Urdu poets, Mir’s Nikāt ush-shuʿārā (Subtle Points about Poets), has this to say about Valī:

[Valī is] from the land of Auranjābād. It is said that he came to Delhi too, and presented himself before Miyaḵ Shāh Gulshan, and recited [before him] some verses of his own. Miyaḵ Ṣāḥib observed, ‘There are all those Persian themes lying unused; bring them into use in your own Rekhtah; who is there to challenge you if you do this?’ And Miyaḵ Ṣāḥib appreciated and praised his poetry.

One is bound to wonder why Shāh Gulshan should have waited for somebody, or even Valī himself, to come from outside Delhi in order to become the recipient of his somewhat unethical advice. Delhi at that time—as at any time in fact—was home to numerous poets. Most of them wrote Persian, and also tried their hand at a bit of Rekhtah. They were perfectly fluent in Persian, and knew Persian poetry as well as Shāh Gulshan did. Shāh Gulshan was not among the major Persian poets in Delhi at the end of the seventeenth century. Mirzā ‘Abd ul-Qādir Bedil (1644-1720) and Muhammad Aţţal Sarkhush (1640-1714) commanded greater respect and a larger-following than anyone else. Bedil was in fact at the apogee of his illustrious career during the 1700’s, and since he wrote a bit of Rekhtah himself, was perhaps the best person to offer such advice to a visitor. We must also remember that Gulshan himself was Bedil’s follower, or perhaps even pupil, in Persian poetry.

To be sure, Valī must have called on Shāh Gulshan, if the latter was in Delhi at the time Valī came there. There is a strong possibility that Gulshan and Valī had been acquainted with each other from before. Gulshan came from Būhānpur, Gujarat, and came at least once to Ahmedābād, where Valī may have met him. There is a small Persian prose tract called Nūr ul-mawriżfat, composed by someone called Valī who describes himself as a pupil of Gulshan. The tract itself is in praise of a seminary called ‘Ḥidāyat Bakhsh’ that was established in Ahmedābād in 1699-1700 by Shaikh-ul-Islām Khān, chief of Gujarat province at that time. Since the oldest known manuscript of this work is dated only to 1853-54, doubts have been expressed about its authenticity as a production of our Valī, the poet.

All that one can say at the moment on this issue is that it would be a little much of a coincidence for Shāh Gulshan to have had two Valīs among his disciples, or for there to have been another Valī and another Gulshan in Gujarat, contemporaneous with our Gulshan and our Valī. Zahir ud-Dīn Madanī asserts Valī’s discipleship of Gulshan as an accepted fact, for he mentions no disputes about it. According to Madanī, the master-pupil connection between Valī and Gulshan would have been for Persian, and would have first occurred at

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10Muṣḥafī, Tażkīrah-e hindī, p. 80.
11Mir, Nikāt ush-shuʿārā, p. 91.
12Valī, Kulliyat-e valī, p. 40.
In short, it was due to the inspiration of the Ḥazrat’s tongue that Vali’s poetry became so well-loved that each and every shi‘r in his divān is brighter than the horizon of sunrise, and he wrote Rekhtah with such expressive power and grace that many ustad’s even of that time began to compose in Rekhtah.

This tale could seem a little more plausible than Mir’s, but for the fact that we know Vali to have already been a substantial poet when he visited Delhi in 1700. While it is impossible to date all his poetry accurately, references to contemporaries who died before 1700 clearly establish the fact of his having been a serious Rekhtah / Hindi poet before 1700. There is, for example, the following agonistic reference to the famous Indo-Persian poet Nāṣir ‘Ali, who died in 1696:

/Were I to send this line
To Nāṣir ‘Ali, he would upon
Hearing it, spring up excited
Like a streak of lightning/.

Lachnī Nara‘īn Shafiq Aurangābādī is a major historian, poet and tazkīrah writer of the South. In his tazkīrah called Chamanistān-e shu‘arā (Poets’ Garden, 1762), he says nothing about Shāh Gulshan in his account of Vali. Mir Ḥasan of Delhi, in his tazkīrah compiled around 1774-78, says nothing about Gulshan’s advice to Vali, but avers that the tavajjūh of Shāh Gulshan made Vali popular. (Tavajjūh, in Sufi terminology, is favourable concentrative attention directed towards a disciple, sometimes in his absence even, for the disciple’s spiritual well-being.) This seems plausible enough, as a statement of faith and reverence. Abu‘l-Ḥasan Amurrūkh Ilāhībādī wrote his Tazkīrah-e masarrat afzā (Delight-enhancing narrative) around 1778-80, partly as a corrective to

13 Madanī, Sukhanvarān-e gujarāt, pp. 86-87.
14 From Ḥāshmi’s introduction to Vali, Kulliyāt-e valī, p. 41.
15 It is a beautiful shi‘r, but unfortunately impossible to render satisfactorily in English. The ‘White Hand of Moses’ refers to a miracle granted to Moses by God at Sinai. He was asked to put his right hand under his collar. It came out entirely white, ‘without stain, or evil’ (Qur‘ān 27:12).
16 Qā‘īm, Makhzan-e nikāt, p. 105.
17 Valī, Kulliyāt-e valī, p. 196.
18 Shafiq Aurangābādī, Chamanistān-e shu‘arā, pp. 82-84.
19 Mir Ḥasan, Tazkīrah-e shu‘arā-e urda, p. 204.
Mir, and partly as a supplement, especially with regard to poets of Allahabad and further east. He clearly disbelieves Mir’s story about Shāh Gulshan and Valī. After summarising Mir’s version in his own words, he sneers, ‘Let the truth or falsehood of this statement be on the original narrator’s head’.20

It is extremely unlikely that Valī’s poetry owes anything to Shāh Gulshan’s instruction or example. But Valī was not sui generis. No great poet is. Valī had the Dakanī tradition and language in his blood, and Gujī also played a part in his nurture. Most important, he had Hasan Shauqi (d.1633?) as his exemplar. Shauqi was in Ahmad Nagar, then in Golconda. But his reputation seems to have been widespread. The main characteristics of Shauqi’s poetry are a richness of sensuous imagery, and a language comparatively free of hard Telugu and tattam Sanskrit influences. The extreme case of such influences was Fakhri-e Din Nizami; a more moderate, but still fairly heavy, instance was Nuṣratī, perhaps the greatest Dakanī poet. Valī’s language had a greater tilt toward the Persian-mixed Rākhtah of Delhi. Most of the ‘Dakanī’ component of Valī’s language is tadbhav, and a good bit of it is to found in Delhi’s register as well.

It appears that a strain of Dakanī / Hindī developed in and around Aurangabad after Aurangzeb and his vast armies established a presence there. This happened even before he took the throne at Delhi. His campaigns in the Deccan continued through his long reign (1658-1707). ‘Abd us-Sattār Siddiqi, perhaps the greatest modern comparative linguist in Urdu, says:

It seems clear that by the end of the tenth century hijrī [1590/1], there were two forms of the Hindustani language in the Deccan. One, which was current in Dravidian -dominated areas of the Deccan, outside the territory of Daulatabad, and found few opportunities to renew its connections with the language of Delhi….The other form of the language was that which was prevalent in Daulatabad and its surrounds. The Mughals turned towards the Deccan in the beginning of the eleventh hijrī century [end of the 1590’s in the CE], and their influence grew fast. They also made Daulatabad their headquarters, and Aurangzeb too

20Amrullah Ilahábádi, Taṣkirah-e masarrat afzā, p. 123.

established the city of Aurangabad just a few miles from there. People from Delhi came to Aurangabad in very large numbers in the times of Shāhjahān and Aurangzeb, and brought Delhi’s high Urdu with them. It renewed and refurbished the language of the territory of Daulatabad, and the Aurangabadi happily adopted the new language of Delhi. And that is the language that we find in Valī, and but for some minor differences, it was the language spoken in Delhi in Valī’s time.21

‘Abd us-Sattār Siddiqi may have simplified the case a bit, but his broad picture is accurate. Shafiq Aurangabādī writes about Nuṣratī that his poems come ‘heavy on the tongue because of their being in the mode of the Dakanī’.22 Hasan Shauqi’s poetry is comparatively gentler on the Aurangabadi ear. Maulvi ‘Abd ul-Ḥaq, who spent a substantial part of his life in Aurangabad, says that in the first half of the eighteenth century, the language registers of Delhi and Aurangabad were practically indistinguishable. Once the Deccan became more or less independent of Delhi in the 1750’s, the language of the Daulatabad-Aurangabad area lost touch with Delhi, and gradually tilted back to the main Dakanī mode.23 Hasan Shauqi is the only Dakanī poet whom Valī mentions as a rival, or worthy of comparison with himself:

/It’s quite proper, oh Valī
If Hasan Shauqi should come
Back from the dead, eager
For my poems!/24

All the others whom Valī ever mentions as equals or inferiors—and he names quite a few—are Persian poets. In a remarkable ghazal, he fits the names of numerous Persian poets

21Valī, Kuliyyāt-e valī, pp. 61-62. ‘Abd ul-Sattār Siddiqi wrote a preface for the 1946 edition of Ḥāshmi’s Kuliyyāt-e valī. It was reprinted in the 1996 edition, from which I am quoting here.

22Shafiq Aurangābādī, Chamanistān-e shu’ārā, p. 80.

23See ‘Abd ul-Ḥaq’s preface to Tamannā Aurangābādī’s taṣkirah, Gul-e ʿajāʾib, p. ze.

in a series, using them, through wordplay, as words of praise for the beloved. Apart from Shauqi, the only Hindi / Rekhtah poet whose name he brings in is Shah Gulshan, and he can be described as a Hindi / Rekhtah poet only by courtesy. The poets are:

1. Mashriqi (Mashhadi)
2. Anvari (Abivardi)
3. (Shaik) Jamali (Kanboh)
4. (`Abd ur-Rahman) Jami
5. Firdausi (Tusi)
6. Hilali (Chaghatayi)
7. (Imam ud-Din) Riyaz
8. (Sa'dullah) Gulshan
9. (Mirza Muhammed 'Ali) Dannah
10. (Nasir) 'Ali (Sarhindi)
11. (Mirza Hashim) Dil
12. (Mir Mu'izz) Fitrat
13. Faashi (Hiravi)
14. (Mir 'Abd us-Samad) Sukhan
15. Zulal (Khvamsari)
16. Faiizi (Akbarbadi)
17. (Muhammad Jann) Qudsii
18. 'Talib (Amul)
19. (Mullah) Shaidi
20. Ahti (Shirazi)
21. Kamal (Isma'ili Isfahani)
22. Badr (Isfahani)
23. Ghazal (Mashhadi)
24. (Amir) Khosrav
25. (Mir) Raushan Zamir
26. (Mir) Hadi Raushan
27. Sali (Tabrizi)
28. Shaukat (Bukhari)
29. (Mirza 'Abd ul-Qadir) Bedil
30. (Mullah) Tughrvi
31. Visali (Dihlavi)
32. (Hasan) Shauqi
33. (Quub ud-Din) Mamil
34. (Nimat Khan) 'Ali

35. Khayali (Kashfi)\(^{25}\)

Interestingly enough—and I see it as Vali's symbolic rejection of the Rekhtah / Hindi poets of Delhi—Vali does refer to two of his junior Dakanii contemporaries, namely, Firangi Bijapuri (1685-1732) and Faqirullah Azad (d.1735/6). One reference to Firangi may even betray a certain pique, if not anxiety.

/Your verses, oh Firangi
Are not at all such as would
Arouse Vali to envy.\(^{26}\)

So what did Vali do? Quite simply, he showed conclusively, and for all time, that Rekhtah / Hindi was capable of great poetry, just as Gujri / Hindi and Dakanii / Hindi were, at their best. Vali also showed that Rekhtah / Hindi could rival, if not surpass, Indo-Persian poetry in sophistication of imagery, complexity and abstractness of metaphor, and mazman afirin, that is, creation of new themes. Historically, perhaps his most important contribution was to infuse among Rekhtah poets the sense of a new poetics—a poetics that owed as much to the Indian-style Persian poetry, and through it to Sanskrit too, as it did to his Dakanii predecessors:

/O Vali, the tongue of the master poet
Is the candle that lights up
The assembly of meanings.\(^{27}\)

/The Beloved has made her place
In Vali's heart and soul

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\(^{25}\) Vali, Kulliyat-e Vali, p. 292. I am tempted to present the ghazal itself for the reader's delectation, but its enjoyment is ineluctably bound up with understanding the entirely untranslatable wordplay.

\(^{26}\) Vali, Kulliyat-e Vali, p. 195. Other references include the incorporation of a misra' of Azad's into a shi'ir of his own (p. 108) and the similar incorporation of a misra' of Firangi's (p. 244). Incorporating a misra' or line of another poet's into one's own work, called iqtibas (quotation), was a form of high praise.

\(^{27}\) Vali, Kulliyat-e Vali, p. 286.
Like meaning in the word.²⁸
/ The way for new themes
Is not closed;
Doors of poetry
Are open forever.

The beloved
Whose Name is Meaning reveals
Herself, bright, when the tongue
Removes the curtain from
The face of Poetry.

Poetry is
Unique in the world, there is
No answer to poetry.²⁹

²⁸Vali, Kulliyat-e vali, p. 203.
²⁹Vali, Kulliyat-e vali, p. 177.