provision for these invaluable aids came from the University of California at Berkeley; we are obliged to the University for supporting our work materially. Aditya Behl’s class on Indian Romances at Berkeley read a penultimate version of the draft translation and were the proverbial intelligent general readers who prompted explanations of the aesthetic resonances and cultural meanings of the poem.

In addition, a number of friends, colleagues, and students generously took time from their busy lives to read drafts of the introduction, notes, and translation. We are much indebted to Lawrence Cohen, Wendy Doniger, Mayu Fisher, Robert Goldman, Linda Hess, Padmanabh Jaini, Vijay Pinch, and Frances Pritchett for responding to all or part of the volume. A special debt of gratitude is owed to the late A. K. Ramanujan, who encouraged us to produce a verse translation that recreated the poetic form of the original text. We are also grateful to Simon Digby for his support and knowledgeable guidance at crucial moments. The sympathetic and generous response to our text from friends and scholars has revivified in our minds the Sanskrit notion of the sahrdaya or sensitive reader. We are beholden to the late Akbar Ali Khan Arshizada of the Rampur Raza Library for allowing us to have access to the Rampur manuscript of the Madhumālati, and to the staff of the Bharat Kala Bhavan for allowing Aditya Behl to consult the Benares manuscripts of the text. The Philadelphia Museum of Art graciously allowed us to use a leaf from their Gulshan-i Išq manuscript for the cover. Judith Luna of Oxford University Press has been an enthusiastic and skilled editor; she has enriched this volume through her interest and efforts. Finally, our sincere thanks to all those who provided warm and considerate hospitality, moral support, and insightful direction at important junctures: Naureen Butt, A. W. Azhar Dehlavi, Yasmin, Shahid, and Mehreen Hosain, the Countess Catherine Raczenska, Jameela Siddiqi, Micaela Soar, Veena Taneja, and the late Begum Sakina of Rampur. Our families have loyalty and lovingly stood by us throughout the long period it took us to complete this work; without them, none of this would have been possible.

---

INTRODUCTION

The Madhumālati (Jasminum grandiflorum, ‘Night-flowing Jasmine’) is a mystical Indian romance composed in AD 1545, here translated for the first time into a western language. Shaikh Mir Sayyid Manjhan Rājghiri, the author, was a Sufi of the Shātari order. The Sufis have been termed the ‘mystics’ of Islam, and Sufism its ‘mystical dimension’. A Sufi, a mystic or spiritual seeker, would, through his initiation to a particular Shaikh, a spiritual master and teacher, become affiliated to a particular spiritual lineage or chain (silsilah). The lineages, organized around links between Sufi masters and their disciples, focused on prayer, fasting, asceticism, and cultivating the self through music and poetry to attain nearness to Allah. The Shātariyyah were an order founded in India in the fifteenth century by Shaikh ʿAbdullāh Shātār. Manjhan was the disciple of a major Shātari Shaikh, Muhammad Ghaus Gvāliyār (d. 1563), and the silsilah was powerful and popular at the time Manjhan wrote his romance.

Manjhan’s name means simply ‘the middle brother’, the midpoint in a series in Hindavi between Chūṭān (the little one) and Budhān (the eldest one). Manjhan’s birthplace Raigir is in the present-day State of Bihar, not far from Patna in northern India, and the poem itself is written in Awadhi or eastern Hindavi. Along with Maithili, Awadhi has remained a major literary dialect of the spoken language of northern and eastern India (‘Bākhā’) since the days of the Delhi sultanate.

Manjhan’s poem belongs to that moment in Indian history when the success of the empire established by the early Mughal rulers Bābur and Humāyūn was not yet a historical certainty.

---


2 For further details about the Shātari silsilah, see below, Section II.
Northern and eastern India, the territory of Hindustan, was occupied by a number of Afghan warlords and Rajput lineages newly demonstrating their martial prowess and attempting to carve out territories for themselves after the demise of the regional sultanates of Delhi and Jaunpur. The Sūr Afghāns from Bihar seized power after their military leader, the warlord Shēr Shāh, had defeated the Mughal emperor Humayun and forced him to flee to Iran in 1540. During the short Afghan interregnum, Sher Shāh Sūr set up an administrative and military structure that was later to prove useful to the Mughal emperors. He was killed in 1545, on the battlefields of the massive fort at Kalinjar, when the base of a cannon exploded towards Sher Shāh rather than away from him. The date is given by a chronogram in Persian, Žāītish mud (‘he died by fire’), an event to which Manjhan alludes when giving the date at which he began his poem.

Sher Shāh was succeeded by his son Islām Shāh—also called Saḥīm Shāh—whom Manjhan praises in his prologue as the king of the time. It is as a poet in residence at Islām Shāh’s cultured and multilingual court that we have the only historical description of our author Manjhan. He is mentioned in the Afsānah-i Shāhān (‘Tale of the Kings’), a chronicle of life in Afghan times that has come to us in the form of the family lore of a Bihari Afghan Shaikh of the early seventeenth century:

Wherever he [Islām Shāh] happened to be, he kept himself surrounded by accomplished scholars and poets. Kiosks [khušshakh] were set up, scented with ḡhāliča [a compound of musk, ambergris, camphor, and oil of ben-nuts*], and provided with betel leaves. Men like Mir Sayyid Manjhan, the author of Madhumalati, Shāh Muhammad Farnūf and his younger brother, Mūsān, Sūrdās and many other learned scholars and poets assembled there and poems in Arabic, Persian and Hindāvī were recited.4

This rich and interactive mixture of vernacular and classical or, in Sheldon Pollock’s phrase, ‘cosmopolitan’ languages was part of a court-sponsored aesthetic culture. The Turkish and Afghan courts of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries fostered the growth of regional literary, musical, and artistic identities. Poets at these courts forged a distinctively Indian Islamic aesthetic culture using models and elements from Persian and Arabic literary and religious traditions as well as from Sanskrit and Indian regional languages.

The historical agents who were part of this Indian Islamic literary culture were, however, not just the courtiers and kings of the Delhi sultanate and the Afghan kingdoms that followed in its wake. They were also disciples in Sufi orders, guided by shaikhs who set themselves up as commanding spiritual jurisdiction (vilāyat) over different parts of the territory of Hindustan. The army of prayer (laškar-i diād), as it is sometimes called, led by these shaikhs formed one dominant cultural force during the period. Sufi shaikhs played at being kingsmakers, and established themselves at a calculated distance from royal courts in hospices (khānaqaš). Here they trained disciples to attain nearness to Allah by teaching them spiritual exercises and cultivating their taste for things spiritual (gaug) through a ritual controlled exposure to music and poetry. They also wrote romances in Hindāvī that describe the ascetic quest of the hero towards the revelatory beauty of a heroine (or God) by linking mortification, fasting, and prayer with a female object of desire. Drawing on the local language of ascetic practice, they made their hero into a yogi, while the heroine is a beautiful Indian woman. Their sensuous romances were recited in different contexts, including

* This come from F. Stétingas, Persian Dictionary.


Introduction

royal courts and Sufi hospices, and these diverse contexts for reception each provide us with protocols of interpretation for the poetry. Kings were celebrated in the prologues of the genre as ideal readers sensitive to the multiple resonances of poetry. In the Sufi hospice, the erotic attributes of the heroine and the seductive descriptions of love-play found in the genre were understood logocentrically as referring ultimately to God rather than to a worldly beloved.

I. The Formation of a Literary Genre

Amīr Khusrau, the celebrated poet who died in Delhi in 1325, famed both for his contributions to Indian music and to Hindavi and Persian poetry, was a disciple and close friend of the great Chishti Shaikh Nizām al-dīn Aulīyā. Although it is certain that he composed poetry in Hindavi to Maḥbūb-i Ilāhī (‘The Beloved of Allah’), as the Chishti Shaikh was affectionately known, no early written manuscripts survive that testify to Khusrau’s literary creativity in the spoken language of Hindustan. The only verses that are available to us come through the oral transmission of generations of singers at Sufi shrines (qawwals), as well as through one eighteenth-century manuscript containing Khusrau’s Hindavi riddles and punning verses. The first surviving longer composition in Hindavi is the Cândāyān, the romance of Lorik and Cândā penned by Maulānā Dā’ūd in 1379. Maulānā Dā’ūd was a highly placed courtier in the retinue of Sultan Firuz Shāh Tughlaq, and wrote the poem in attendance at the provincial court of Dalmau in Awadh. His immediate patron was Malik Mubārak, the nobleman assigned to Awadh as the muqta or governor of the province (iqta).

Maulānā Dā’ūd was also a disciple of Shaikh Zain al-dīn Chishti, the nephew of Shaikh Naṣīr al-dīn Maḥmūd ‘Chirāgh-i Dīlī’ (‘The Lamp of Delhi’), the successor to Shaikh Nizām al-dīn Aulīyā. Shaikh Zain al-dīn was the caretaker of the shrine in Delhi, but his competition with Sayyid Muhammad ‘Gesūdarāz’ (‘Long Locks’), his uncle’s prize pupil, led to a dispute that ended in the interment of his uncle’s spiritually charged material relics (tabarrukāt) with the body of the great Shaikh. The rivalry was part of a frequent pattern of competition in which the lineal descendants of Sufi shaikhs disagreed with their spiritual disciples over the succession. Possession of the tabarrukāt was often the key to making any claims to authority.8 Shaikh Zain al-dīn took care of the shrine in Delhi after the death of Shaikh Naṣīr al-dīn Maḥmūd and the departure of Sayyid Muhammad Gesūdarāz on his spiritual conquest of the Deccan. He also instructed disciples, amongst whom was the Hindavi poet Maulānā Dā’ūd.

The generic model that Maulānā Dā’ūd created in the Cândāyān is a composite one, and one which can best be seen as the textural record of the historical interaction of the Chishti Sufis with Sanskritic, Persian, and regional religious and literary traditions. In his creative engagement with Indian and Persian literary models and conventions, Dā’ūd takes topoi and narrative motifs from diverse sources and refits them into a framework adapted from the Persian maganvī. Chief among the conventions taken from Persian are the elaborate theoretical prologues that frame these romances within the metaphysics of an Islamic godhead reinscribed in a local language as well as within courtly and Sufi institutional settings with their distinct yet interlinked protocols of reception. The central aesthetic value or linchpin of Dā’ūd’s literary creation, however, is a uniquely Indian poetics of rasa, the ‘juice’ or ‘flavour’ of a literary text, poem, or play. Along with the Hindavi words kāma,

---


9 See Section III below.
desire', and prema, 'love', Dāūd uses the aesthetics of rasa to link the narrative pleasure of listening to love-stories with the erotics of union with an impossibly distant transcendent God. His distinctive literary formula also contains elements taken from Indian regional traditions such as the bārahmāśā, the rural songs describing the twelve months of separation from one's beloved.10

Rasa itself was defined famously in Bharata's eighth-century Sanskrit aesthetic treatise, the Nāṭya-Sāstra, as the juice or flavour of a poem arising from 'the combination of the vibhāvas (sources of rasa), the anubhāvas (actions, experiential signs of rasa), and the sentary emotions (vyabhicārībhāvas)'.11 The aim of reading is to have an experience of the dominant rasa that animates the poem, and the sahādaya, or cultivated reader, feels the emotions of the parted lovers in the poem. The sahādaya's response is shaped by the sources of rasa depicted by the poet. These include monsoon clouds indicating the season of love, the experiential signs of love such as bodies trembling and perspiring from desire, and the transitory emotions that attend the progress of the main emotional mood of a poem: apprehension, envy, contentment, shame, joy, and so on. A reader can approach the poet's vision and the feelings of the characters only because he is a rasika or connoisseur.

Dāūd approaches these classical conventions and ideas creatively, using them to compose a text that served as a model or formula for an entire regional tradition of Indian Sufi poetry. After the Cāndāyan of Maulānā Dāūd stands Qurban's Mirīgāvī (1503), composed at the court of Sultan Ḥusain Shāh Sharqī of Jaunpur. Although there are scattered references to two romances entitled the Paiman and the Jot Niranjan from the early sixteenth century, these have not survived.12 The model of the Cāndāyan and the Mirīgāvī is emulated most powerfully by Malik Muhammad Jāyasī, several poems by whom are still extant. Pre- eminent among these is the Padnāvat (1540), which tells the story of King Ratansen of Chittaur and his quest for the Princess Padnāvat. In addition, he composed a version of the life of Krishna called the Kanḥāvat, as well as a number of shorter poems. These include the Akhrīvat ('Alphabet Poem'), an acrostic composed out of the beliefs of a millenarian group of Sufis (the Mahāvī of Jaunpur), and the Akhrī Kalām ('Discourse on the Last Day') a foreshadowing of the events of doomsday. Finally, there is the Madhumālātī (1545) of Mīr Sayyid Ḍīmān Rājgīrī, the Shaṭṭārī Sufi attached to the court of ʿĪsām Shāh Ṣūfī.13 Although poets continued to compose romances on this model until the early twentieth century, they did not reproduce the formula of the two heroines or the elaborate Sufi ideology of the earlier works.14

What is an ideal romance for the authors and audiences of the Hindavī narratives? All four poets use the same metre and form and all draw on the conventions of the Persian maqāna to frame their romances with introductory prologues. In these prologues there is first praise of God, then of Muhammad and the first four 'righteous' Caliphs, then praise for the king of the time and the author's immediate patron, then praise and thanks to the author's spiritual guide followed by a disclaimer of the poet's own poetic skills. The stories are set in the ambience of the court, with kings and queens, princes and princesses, handmaids, friends and companions. There are marvellous palaces...

---

10 For examples of these, as well as a sound discussion of the meanings and literary place of the bārahmāśā, see Charlotte Vaudeville, Bārahmāśā in Indian Literature: Songs of the Twelve Months in Indo-Aryan Literatures (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).
12 S. A. A. Rizvi, A History of Sufism in India (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1983), ii. 155 n. 2.
13 For summary accounts of these texts, see R. S. McGregor, Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984), 26-8, 66-73.
14 R. S. McGregor, Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century, 150-4.
and lush gardens containing mango orchards, canals of cool running water, and picture-pavilions. Demons, heavenly nymphs, wonderful beings, and magical events all add to the imaginative allure of these works. Early in each poem an image of divine beauty is introduced: the heroine’s body is described in a formal literary set-piece called a nakh-sīk-varan (‘toe-to-head description’) in Sanskrit which parallels the sarāpā (‘head-to-foot description’) in Persian and uses the same symbolism and imagery. In the twenty verses of these set-pieces, the beloved is described from the top of her head to her legs, usually with verses alternating between emphasizing divine grace and beauty (jamāl) and divine might and majesty (jalāl). This first encounter of the lover and the beloved is treated as a way of conveying the Sufi concept of the first meeting of the soul with divinity in the phenomenal world. After this initial contact with the image of divine beauty, which is then taken away, the hero begins to suffer from viraha, the pain of love in separation. The stories of the romances are driven by the urge to transform this desire into a mutually fulfilling love, called prema-rasa by the poets.

All the plots have certain formulaic elements that are drawn from earlier canons or common cultural stereotypes about gender and culture and reshaped into a distinctive formula by the Hindavi poets. These include the moment of the awakening of love through a vision, a dream, or a description of the heroine’s beauty as a divine manifestation, a convention common to both Persian and Indian romances. The hero and heroine have helpers who commonly exemplify spiritual values such as mystical absorption (sahāja) or the abstract quality of love (prema). Alternatively, there are demons to fight and trials of strength, which the lovers have to pass through in order to attain each other. The necessary transformation of the hero into a yogi and his ascetic quest draws on the poetry of the Gorakshānāth panth. The ordeals on the quest for the beautiful princess and the passage to a heavenly realm are modelled on Persian spiritual quests like ’Attār’s Conference of the Birds. The hero’s abandonment of a first wife in order to consummate his love with the divine heroine is a distinctive motif, and ultimately draws on the common cultural stereotype of the jealousy between co-wives (saustan) in a harem. This deserted wife then sings a bīrāhmāsā, a description of her suffering from the pain of love in separation in each of the twelve months of the year, which is conveyed to the hero. On hearing it, the hero takes his divine beloved and returns home with her, whereupon the two co-wives quarrel and have to be reconciled. The hero’s resolution of the strife between the co-wives, his death and the burning of both his wives on his funeral pyre uses the misogynistic stereotype of the Indian woman’s saññ to signify a mystical annihilation (fanā).

II. The Shatīrī Sufi Sīsilah

The involvement of the Shatīrīs in this richly creative religious and literary world began with the founder of the spiritual lineage, Shaikh Abdullāh Shatīr (d. 1485), who came to India from central Asia in the second half of the fifteenth century. In the competitive cultural landscape of northern India, it might have been expected that a newcomer would settle in a single place and slowly build up his following and area of spiritual influence, his vilayat. However, ‘Abdullāh Shatīr preferred a rather more martial style of public presentation. He travelled widely with a large retinue of disciples dressed in military uniforms, and, to the beat of drums, in every town or village, he demanded to know if there was anyone who wished to be shown the way to God. Inevitably the Shaikh’s claims to spiritual superiority brought him into competition with the Sufis who were prominent in the regional sultanates. Eventually, he settled down in Mandu under the patronage of Sultan Ghiyāḥ al-dīn Tughlaq and was buried there after his death.


Introduction

One of the prominent Sufis who both ignored his challenge and made disparaging remarks about the outlandish claims of newly arrived Sufis from Khurasan and Fars, was the Bengali Shaikh Muhammad Qāzīn 'Alā, who was the maternal grandfather of our author, Manjhan. His initial hostility was overturned by a miraculous dream in which his deceased father told him his spiritual future was in the hands of Shaikh 'Abdollāh. He left for Mandu and waited three days outside the Shaikh's house until, moved by his humility, the Shaikh took him on as a disciple, but only after he had promised to give up his previous methods and learn Shaṭṭārī practices. Shaikh Qāzīn 'Alā (d. 1495) became Shaikh 'Abdollāh's principal khalīfa or successor, and took the Shaṭṭārī method of spiritual practice to Bengal and eastern India. Shaikh 'Abdollāh Shaṭṭār forges a distinctive spiritual regimen based on fasting, ascetic exercises, practices of visualization, and the Arabic letters that made up the names of Allah.

These practices were passed down in his lineage through the successors of Shaikh Qāzīn 'Alā, Shaikh Zuhūr Ḥāji Ḥamīd (d. 1523) and Shaikh Abūl Faṭḥ Ḥadiyālullāh Sarmāst (d. 1539). These Shaikhs established a Shaṭṭārī presence in Bihar and had many links with local lineages such as the Firdausīs, as well as with the rulers of Bihar. Shaikh Ḥamīd had as disciples the remarkable brothers Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus and Shaikh Phūl. Under him they learned the Shaṭṭārī method of zikr, the esoteric science of the invocation of the names of Allah enshrined in the letters of the Arabic alphabet. They also performed forty-day fasts and meditated in the caves and jungles around the town of Chunar. During this period Muhammad Ghaus composed the most famous work of Shaṭṭārī asceticism, the Jawāhir-i Khamsah ('Five Jewels').

Arranged in 'five jewels' that ascend from ordinary prayers to the inheritance and realization of divine truth, the work was seen as a summum of esoteric Indian Sufi practice and is commonly found in manuscript form in shrine libraries to this day.

The third jauhar or jewel, the central part of the book, is focused on the invocation of the divine names. This mode of practice, with elaborate prescriptions for purity and directions for gaining different sorts of powers, implies a Sufi notion of the human body as the site for a divine manifestation in microcosm. Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus's account of the coming into being of all created things is encoded in the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet. In Shaṭṭārī letter-mysticism, combinations of letters signified selected names of Allah in sequence as well as places in the Shaṭṭārī cosmology, and each was the abbreviated code for a different Shaṭṭārī practice. Apart from interior visualization, the Shaṭṭārī cosmology had another application: to predict or to influence the future by calling up the angels or spiritual agents of each station in order to make them perform whatever task was desired, or to make an efficacious talisman or amulet. Each of the twenty-eight letters was matched with a numerical value, a name of Allah, a quality, either terrible or benevolent, a perfume or incense, an element, a zodiacal sign, a planet, a jinn, and a guardian angel. These were called up in rituals of invocation that varied with the particular goals of the seeker.

In accordance with the order's tradition of conquering new territory, Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus went to Gwalior in 1523. After three years, he had acquired a considerable following and was an acknowledged influence on the local population. This enabled him to intervene in the political and military struggle over Hindustan between the Afghan rulers and the Mughals in the 1520s. Although the received Sufi wisdom was to avoid having anything to do with kings, in sixteenth-century India Sufi

---

17 A detailed account of this practice, as well as an extensive table containing all the stations and all their corresponding elements, is given in Thomas Hughes, 'Dawān', in Dictionary of Islam (1895; repr. Calcutta: Rupa, 1988), 72-3. For more details about Shaṭṭārī magical practices, see Jafar Sharif, G. A. Henleots, and William Crooke, Islam in India or the Qānūn-i-Islām: The Customs of the Mussalmans of India (1921; repr. New Delhi: Oriental Books, 1972), 211-77. For a review of the scholarship on Indo-Muslim esoteric practices, see Marc Gaborieau, 'L'Ésotérisme musulman dans le sous-continent indo-pakistanais: un point de vue ethnologique', Bulletin d'Études Orientales, 44 (1992), 191-209.
lineages like the Chishti, the Naqshbandi, and the Shatari took sides with Mughals or Afghans in their struggles for sovereignty over northern India. The Chishti, for example, had longstanding historical connections with local Afghan sultans and nobility and did not back the Mughals in their fight for supremacy. On the other hand, Shaikh Muhammad Ghau, the poet Manjhan’s spiritual guide, was instrumental in the Mughal emperor Babur’s capture of the fort of Gwalior from the Afghans. By passing privileged information to the leader of the Mughal forces and exhorting him to establish a token presence in the city, the Shaikh enabled Babur’s army to seize this key strategic fortress through a covert night attack. He was rewarded with a considerable land grant on which he built his hospice in Gwalior. His establishment became a favoured site for aristocratic patronage during the reigns of Babur and Humayun. Shaikh Muhammed Ghau and his brother Shaikh Phul were so highly influential in the Mughal court that many Sufis of other lineages took Shatari affiliation in addition to their own existing connections, simply in order to acquire patronage and position.  

The emperor Humayun in particular was extremely interested in occult and mystical matters and was especially favourably disposed to the Shatari. One imperial chronicle relates that Shaikh Muhammad Ghau and his brother Shaikh Phul taught the emperor occult sciences and were very much in favour at court. Humayun’s younger brother Mirza Hindal eventually had Shaikh Phul murdered in 1539 when the Shaikh attempted to dissuade him from making his own bid for power. Shatari fortunes suffered a further reversal when Sher Shah Suri defeated Humayun in 1540. When Humayun went into exile in Iran, Manjhan cultivated the Afghan court, almost certainly with the encouragement of his spiritual guide Shaikh Muhammad Ghau. The Shaikh himself, on the other hand, fled from Afghan reach to the sultanate of Gujarat, whence he conducted a secret correspondence with Humayun. In this way, the Shatari had both possible outcomes covered. The author of the Madhumalati, Shaikh Manjhan, with impressive pedigrees as the grandson of Shaikh Qazin ‘Ali and as the spiritual disciple of Shaikh Muhammad Ghau, was at the very centre of the Shatari Sufi order when it was at its most vigorous and influential. When his presence was noted as a courtier at the court of Isam Shah, it would have been both as a poet and as a Sufi Shaikh, almost certainly by then authorized to give spiritual instruction to others.

A person wishing to set out on the spiritual path would first find a Shaikh, either one personally impressive or one belonging to the chosen Sufi lineage, who was willing and authorized to accept him or her as a pupil. Along with the authorization, ijazat, went the barakat, the grace, blessing, spiritual power, which derived from the spiritual founder of the lineage and was passed from one Shaikh to another down the chain, the silsilah. Thus a lineage was a chain of blessings and authority, and the different orders were distinguished one from another by the pedigree of the Shaikhs who were members. A spiritual lineage was also known as a tariqah, a path or way, and a disciple on the path was known as a siliq, a traveller. Each lineage had its own path of spiritual training and development, although all included such spiritual practices as prayer, fasting and other privations, periods of seclusion, attendance at the Shaikh’s talks, collective and private formulaic repetitions, self-observation and self-awareness exercises. What is important for the understanding of Shaikh Manjhan’s poem is how the Shatari tariqah differed from those of other orders.

Introduction

come as no surprise that the Shaikh represented his efforts as liberating useful practices for cultivating spiritual awareness from the shackles of false belief. These practices included: using exercises for breath control, using yogic postures for sitting, maintaining ritual purity of place and person, assimilating the Indian yogic chakras and their tutelary deities into the Shaţţārī cosmology, controlling diet strictly to exclude flesh and liquor, and using certain Hindāvi words in the ẓikr (repetition of names and attributes of Allah, often done in conjunction with physical exercises to accomplish spiritual transformation). In addition, the Shaţţārīs claimed their method of spiritual development to be swifter than the methods of other lineages in effecting the spiritual transformation of its disciples. According to the Shaţţārīyya technique, the neophyte at the very beginning of his training is required to consider himself in the presence of Being and then descend step by step from the realm of Self-manifestation of the Absolute to the phenomenal world. Then step by step he ascends and reaches the Divine sphere, effacing all traces of the stages of ascent. In contrast to this method, the other Sufis direct their disciples to ascend step by step from the realm of humanity to Wahdat al-Wujud [the unity of all existence].

Shaţţārī self-transformation was thus focused on realizing the human being’s link with Allah and seeing oneself as part of a larger universe that has its source in Allah and refracts the divine essence through the many veils of existence. The circular structure implied by the initial taste of jāzbah or mystical absorption and the eventual return to Being can be seen to have its impact on the plot-structure of the Madhumālātī. Thus, the hero Manohar (‘Heart-enchanting’) meets his divine beloved Madhumālāti through supernatural agency, falls in love with her, is separated, and then has to climb back step by step to the joys that he first tasted in a midnight encounter. In addition, as one scholar has pointed out, ‘The Shattārs did not have to pass through the stage of fanā [evanescence] or the final stage of fanā al-fanā [extinction in evanescence]. Their intuitive perception of Allah in their own beings was permanent. This state was described as baqā al-baṣā, the everlasting reintegration of the spirit with Allah. Mystics of other silsilahs were either conscious of their love for God or experienced ecstasy while the Shattārs transcended these two states as separate conditions producing a new combination of their own.’ The Shaţţārī poet Manjhan eschews the generic pattern of the two co-wives of the hero and their final annihilation on a funeral pyre. As we shall see, his romance ends with the everlasting and blissful union of the two pairs of happy lovers.

III. The Prologue to the Story

Despite these broad correspondences between Shaţţārī cosmology and poetic meaning, we should emphasize that there is no single or flat allegorical scheme to be found in the events and imagery of the story. Rather, when these works were performed in Sufi hospices and royal courts, different protocols of interpretation were used to explain the poem’s mystical or erotic meanings and allegorical moments. In the elaborate prologue to the romance, the poet establishes a set of historical and theoretical frameworks that enable us to delineate these different understandings of his poem. These are modelled on the panegyric conventions of the Persian magnavi or verse romance, which begin with the praise of God (kamd), the Prophet Muhammad (nāsir), the ruling king, and the author’s commissioning patron, frequently a highly placed nobleman or courtier. In common with the other poets of the genre, Manjhan extends these conventions to create a set of distinctive Hindāvi metaphysical and aesthetic terms. He begins his prologue with six verses in praise of Allah. Manjhan links the Creator first with ‘love, the treasure-house of joy’ (prema prīti sukhanidhi), the

---

22 Rizvi, A History of Sufism in India, ii. 151–2.
23 For a concise definition of the Persian magnavi, a heroic, historical, didactic, or romantic poem composed in rhyming couplets (aa, bb, cc, etc.), see Jan Rypka et al., History of Iranian Literature (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969), 98 et passim. For an example of the genre translated into English with a good introductory discussion, see Niţâmi, Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance, tr. Julie Scott Meisami (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
central value of the love-story. Then he sketches out the attributes of the ruler of the universe: the Creator (vīdhātā), Lord (gosā ḫn), King (rājā) of the three worlds (heaven, earth, and the nether world, the tribhuvana) and the four ages (juga). In contrast to all of these stands the poet, whose tongue is not equal to the praise of the glorious Creator. When all those who came before him have failed in the task, how can the poor poet Manjhan succeed in conveying Allah’s true stature?

Manjhan answers his rhetorical question by asserting that his poem can only go “as far as the bird of knowledge can fly, as deep as the mind can fathom . . . beyond that point, where are the means?” Despite this metaphysical and poetic assumption of Allah’s ineffable nature, the poet goes on to find Hindavi approximations for the widespread Sufi theory of wahrāt al-wujūd or the unity of all existence, playing on the Lord’s unity (wahrāt) and his multiplicity (kasrat). Manjhan expresses his amazement at the contrast between the oneness of the Creator and the multiplicity of created forms behind which God is hidden. Manjhan represents the Lord as unqualified, yet singular, hidden, yet manifest, formless, yet many-formed. Manjhan refers to the Names of Allah, which are so important as prototypes of all things in existence. In the Sufi cosmogony, these form the patterns or models through which divine light is refracted into the veils of existence. Manjhan’s use has a special referent, though, because the Shaṭṭārīs formulated an elaborate system of letter mysticism and cosmology based on the Names of Allah. The divine Names were used extensively by the Shaṭṭārīs to inculcate God’s qualities or attributes in the practitioner.

Next, he uses the convention of the nādat (praise of the Prophet) and the praise of the ‘companions’ of the Prophet elegantly to suggest Muhammad’s true nature. Muhammad is not simply the Prophet but rather the cosmic principle of the Creator within creation, the reason for creation and the light within it. Manjhan uses the paradoxical logic of the Sufi theory of the refraction of divine light into the forms of this world to declare the sole substantial reality of Muhammad’s body (sarīra) and the shadowiness of the concrete, sensible world: ‘He is the substance, and the world his shadow.’ Further, he uses the Hindavi word rūpa (‘form, beauty’) to skirt the language of incarnation dangerously. Allah is alaḫ, the invisible one, but the form that can be seen is that of Muhammad. The true meaning of this beautiful form is God; significantly, rūpa is also used extensively in the erotic encounter in the romance to refer to the divine and human aspects of the love that blossoms between the hero and heroine. He ends his nādat with the standard words of praise for: the first four ‘righteous’ Caliphs, expressed simply and beautifully.

There follows the traditional address of obeisance (khtāb-i zamānīn) to the ruling sultan, Salīm Shāh, which is couched in terms of conventional extravagance. Modelled on Persian prologues that themselves draw on the inflated claims and rhetoric of Islamic texts on politiy and statescraft (‘mirrors for princes’), the address to Salīm Shāh waxes eloquent in praise of the king’s generosity, bravery, and justice. Manjhan uses the standard tropes of the lion and cow playing happily together, of lamb and wolf grazing together in peace, to describe Salīm Shāh as an ideally just king and his state as a ‘garden come to flower without any thorns’. He also refers to kings famed for their greatness and nobility in Indian mythology and history: the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas from the Mahābhārata, Yudhishṭhira, the generous Karna, and the cultivated patron of poetry and the arts, King Bhoja of Ujjain. Manjhan also praises the Afghan nobleman and military commander Khīzr Khān Turk, a regional governor of Bengal who may have patronized the poet and supported him in his entourage.

The balance of spiritual over temporal is then redressed by no fewer than eight verses in praise of Manjhan’s spiritual guide, Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus Gvāliyāri. As we have seen, Shaikh Muhammad was intimately involved in politics at the Mughal courts of Gvāli and Agra. The verses addressed to him emphasize his long years of asceticism and his importance in defining Sufi practice for seekers at his hospice. He is described...
as a great Shaikh, 'profound in knowledge, matchless in beauty'.
The poet focuses on two crucial aspects of the Shaikh’s power: the
transformative power of his gaze (disiti), and the figurai
tinghip of even a disciple of his. The first of these refers to the
power of the gaze of the spiritual guide, which can reach within
a disciple’s being and change his way of being in the world. The
disciple can then triumph over ‘death’, a reference to the Sufi
experience of fanā, self-annihilation on the path. The triumph
over death refers to the stage of subsistence after annihilation,
baqā. Here the poet uses the Hindvdi disiti to approximate the
Persian tavajjh, the absorbed attention of the Shaikh which
transforms the consciousness of the disciple, awakening him to
the unseen mysteries of the Shattārī spiritual cosmos. Such a
disciple becomes not merely an earthly king like the one the poet
has been praising, but king over all the ages of the world.

Having completed the conventional and historical proprieties,
Manjhan now comes to defining some theoretical terms that are
important for a fuller understanding of his poem. He elevates
prema-rasa to the rāja-rasa, the royal rasa, and sketches out
three key elements of his aesthetic: the ideology of love (prema),
the importance of ascetic practice, and the privileged status of
language in disseminating the truth embodied in poetry. To
begin with Manjhan’s view of love, the topos can be traced back
to Persian maznavi prologues, which frequently include short
philosophical reflections on love or poetry. These ordinarily
emphasize that the world has its foundation in love, without
which the human being is just an aggregate of clay and water.
Similarly, in Manjhan’s Madhumālatī, the very first word is love,
and the final couplet is again devoted to love. Love is thus
both the beginning and the consummation of his work. For
Manjhan, love is much more than the feeling human beings
sometimes have for one another; it is a cosmic force which
pre-exists creation, which drives creation and which permeates
creation. Particularly beloved by Sufis with regard to the causes
of creation is the tradition attributed to God: ‘I was a hidden
treasure and longed that I should be known’. While one under-
standing of this tradition is that God created the universe
because he wished to be known, another understanding

emphasizes that it is only through love that God can be known.
For Manjhan, then, love is the most precious property in the
universe. Along with love goes suffering, particularly the pain
felt of being separate from one’s beloved, whether human or
divine. This pain of love in separation, vīroha, is both an intense
sorrow and a great blessing because it is the very means by which
the human soul becomes self-conscious.

Love and beauty are central to the aesthetics of the Mad-
humālatī, in which the heroine becomes an exemplification
of the process of the self-disclosure of the divine. Her beauty
awakens love within the seeker, while vīraha, the condition
of being separated from his beloved, drives him onwards along the
Sufi path. The path of asceticism involved, among the Shattārī
Sufis, an intensive regimen of fasting and vegetarianism,
supereogatory prayers, and a programme of yogic exercises and
letter-mysticism. As we have seen, the Arabic letters of the
Names of Allah encoded a system of visualization and interior
discipline. Manjhan also refers to the unique Shattārī engage-
ment with the Indian practices of yoga, exhorting the seeker to
‘abandon consciousness, wisdom, and knowledge’ in order to
focus on meditative practice. He describes as a void (sunā)
the place where the seeker can remain absorbed in the attributeless
Allah. Allah is the Absolute, the ground for revealing the self to
itself. In this ascetic regimen, all created forms are refractions of
divine essence but need spiritual practice in order to realize their
identity-in-difference with divinity.

In addition, the poet uses the term sahaja-samādhi, the ‘mystic
union of Sahaja’. In Kabir and the other north Indian
devotional poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, sahaja refers
to the soul’s ‘spontaneous or self-born’ unity with the attribute-
less or nirguna Rāma, the transcendence in immanence to which
the seeker has to awaken. Among the Sufi poets the term
represents the internalization of the Sufi paradox of the identity, yet
radical difference, of the being of divinity and human beings.
This carries through into Manjhan’s view of language, which

See Charlotte Vaudeville, A Weaver Named Kabir (Delhi: Oxford Uni-
versity Press, 1993), i75.
Introduction

A story sweet as nectar I will sing to you:
O experts in love, pay attention and listen!
Such juicy matters only connoisseurs know,
tasteless stuff is tossed out by them.
Termites run away from wood without juice;
will carrels eat cane without any sugar?
Whatever has rasa, is enjoyed as such,
and the man who does not have the taste
will find even the tasteful tasteless.

Many tastes are found in the world, O connoisseurs!
But listen: I shall describe love, the royal savour of savours.

IV. Manohar and Madhumalati

After this elaborate prologue, the poet begins the story of Manohar and Madhumalati in earnest. Many of the narrative motifs that he uses will be instantly recognizable to readers of Indian and Islamic story literatures. For instance, the story opens with King Sūrajbhaṇu (Light of the Sun) who has everything conceivable except a son, for whom he longs and hopes. For twelve years he serves an ascetic, who finally gives his Queen a small morsel of magical food which results in her giving birth to a son, a motif common to many Indian epic, literary, and folk traditions. The major device used to order the plot is the initial night: meeting between the lovers orchestrated by flying nymphs, after which the lovers must wander in pain until they are able to regain that first flush of felicity. This motif occurs also elsewhere, most famously in the Arabian Nights, in the tale of the

encapsulates the paradox. As he points out, 'if words arise from mortal mouths, then how can the word be imperishable?' Further, 'if man, the master of words, can die, then how does the word remain immortal?' Language becomes the currency of immortality for the poet, since it encompasses the divine and the human. Words endure, although humans pass away. The answer to this paradox, of course, is that the word, like divinity, is perpetually alive because it is refracted in every heart.

In itself this topos is directly traceable to Persian prologues, which contain frequent reflections on poetry or verbal discourse (suhkhan). These focus on the creative power of the word Kων or 'Bo', with which Allah created the heavens and the earth. This is approximated in the Hindavi text to the mystic word Om, which Manjhan borrows from Indian religious systems to express the might and majesty of Allah in the Qurānic cosmogony. Manjhan makes the word the foundation of creation, as well as of all poetic discourse. As he puts it, 'If the Maker had not made the word, how could anyone hear stories of pleasure?' The poet resolves the paradox of identity-indifference through his claim that divinity is manifest (pargata) in the word, an incarnationist view that would be heretical to express in Persian. Language, in Hindavi poetics, becomes the ground for understanding and representing the revelation of divinity to humans.

Language thus embodies poetic pleasure, but it also becomes the medium for another sort of embodiment: the refraction of the divine essence in visible form. For the Hindavi Sufi poets, the body of the heroine provokes a blinding flash of revelation in the eyes of the seeker. The revelatory flash pushes the seeker on to his quest for love, to realize the union that he has only glimpsed in his vision. To savour prema-rasa is to understand the secret of the shared identity-in-difference between the seeker and the sought, the subject and object of mysticism. Manjhan asks his audience to cultivate the taste for this royal rasa at the end of his prologue:

---

[43.1–6]

Rasa is the pleasure which listeners or readers take in stories as well as the lovers' consummation of desire in the savour or juice of love (prema). The Sufi cosmology within which this aesthetic of prema-rasa is set allows the Hindavi Sufi poets to refer suggestively to the relation of mirrored desire between God and creatures. It is in this sense that the Hindavi romances are susceptible to interpretation in multiple ways, whether as sensuous ornate poetry in courtly performance, or as mystical verses referring ultimately to God within the context of Sufi shrines.

Prince Qamar al-Zamān. In that story, the lovely Princess Budur is carried to the bedroom of Qamar al-Zamān by flying jinns, who cannot decide which of the two is more beautiful. They leave them there overnight while they go to play. The Prince and Princess awaken, look at each other and fall in love. When they go to sleep again, the jinns carry the Princess back to her father’s palace, and the Prince spends the rest of the story on a quest for the beautiful maiden who captured his heart in a midnight encounter. In the same way, the plot of the Madhumalati, in common with those of the other Hindavi Sufi romances, draws the reader into the story by arousing his or her desire and constantly deferring that desire till the lovers attain erotic, narrative, and spiritual consummation.

Once the hero is born, astrologers are summoned who name the child Manohar. Foreshadowing the central narrative themes of desire (kama), separation (viraha), and love (prema), they also predict that in his fourteenth year he will meet his beloved and fall in love. The two will then be separated and he will wander as a yogi for a year suffering the pain of love in separation. After that he will be King in all his births. The Prince is brought up and properly educated so that at the age of 12 he is crowned King. When he reaches the age of 14 some passing nymphs, attracted by his good looks, resolve to find a Princess for him of matching beauty. They debate the matter and decide on Madhumalati, the daughter of King Vikram Rāi. The King rules the city of Mahārās, the great rasa, suggesting the ultimate aesthetic and spiritual value of prema-rama. To compare the lovers, the nymphs transport Manohar to Madhumalati’s bedroom and put his bed next to hers. Astonished at the resulting loneliness they pronounce them a perfect match and go off to play. Manohar wakes up and is amazed by Madhumalati’s beauty, which the poet describes in the twenty verses of a head-to-foot description of the heroine’s body.

When Madhumalati wakes up she becomes extremely alarmed, but as they talk, love, coming from a former birth, is born between them. They pledge themselves to eternal fidelity and make love—though not fully—and then fall asleep. The nymphs return and are horrified at their dishevelled state and quickly carry back Manohar to his palace. When he awakes, the pain of separation overwhelms the Prince and he tells his nurse Sahajā (the simple or spontaneous mystery or mystical state) what has happened. Various kinds of doctors are called but they fail to cure him because they do not know love. Eventually Manohar resolves to set out against his parents’ wishes to find Madhumalati in Mahārās. He disguises himself as a saffron-clad yogi and sets out with a large retinue, but as they cross an ocean a storm sinks the ship. All are destroyed except Manohar who is washed up on a foreign shore, ‘alone save for the name of Madhumalati and the mercy of God’.

Manohar sets off inland and reaches a plantain forest, the kädali vana that signifies the place of self-mortification and spiritual attainment in Tantric practice and devotional poetry in the north Indian languages. As he is wandering through this dark wood, he finds a pavilion in which a young and innocent Princess, Pemā (Love), is imprisoned. She is the beloved daughter of King Citrasena of Citbisarāṇa (Forgetfulness or Ease-of-Mind). She was out playing with her girlfriends when they had to take shelter in a gallery or pavilion painted with pictures (citrasārī) to escape a swarm of bees. The pictures painted on the walls of the pavilion suggest the realm of images (zālam-i imāl) in Sufi cosmology, one step closer to the world of concrete phenomena than the place of the divine Names. As they came out of the picture-pavilion a demon seized her and brought her to the dark forest where she is an unhappy prisoner. Manohar introduces himself and tells her about Madhumalati. Pemā, in reply, says she is a childhood friend of Madhumalati’s and that Madhumalati visited her parents’ home with her mother every month. When he hears this, Manohar resolves to save Pemā by


confronting the demon. When the demon returns, Manohar wounds it, but the demon miraculously recovers. Pemā explains that there is a tree whose ambrosial fruit grants immortality, and that it resides the demon’s life. Hearing this, Manohar knows that Allah would give him victory if he could but destroy the tree. He is hesitant to commit the sin of killing a living tree, but is persuaded by Pemā’s unfortunate plight. By cutting down the tree and uprooting the trunk, he leaves the demon no source from which to renew his life. Once the demon is dead, Manohar takes Pemā back to her parents, who are so grateful they offer him their kingdom and Pemā’s hand in marriage. He declines, since his heart is pledged to Madhumālatī. He becomes increasingly impatient to set off on his quest again, when Pemā informs him that Madhumālatī and her mother are coming the next day. He waits in the picture-pavilion, restless with the pain of separation. Pemā brings Madhumālatī there, leaving them together as she guards the door. Manohar moves in and out of consciousness in her presence. She is initially angry at his cruelty in deserting her, until their former love reawakens. They renew their vow not to make love fully until they are married and fall asleep together. Madhumālatī’s mother, meanwhile, worrying about her daughter, descending on the pavilion and finds them there together. Overcome with shame and rage, she has Madhumālatī taken back to Mahāras, where she utters a spell and transforms Madhumālatī into a bird. When Manohar wakes up he finds Madhumālatī gone; he is cast down once more in his own bedroom at Kanagiri. He resumes his yogic disguise and sets off again on the quest for his beloved.

Madhumālatī, transformed into a bird, flies all round the world in search of Manohar. This motif is found commonly in Islamic mystical literature, in which the divine in the form of the Universal Spirit moves through the world in the form of a dove after creation.  She suffers horribly from viraha, the pain of love in separation. Despairing, she sees a Prince who looks like Manohar and allows herself to be caught. He is Prince Tārācand of Pavanerī (Wind City, a reference to the airs or winds of the subtle yogic body) who, hearing her story, leaves his kingdom to serve her and bring her back to her family and native land. Madhumālatī’s mother is full of remorse and quickly restores her to her former self. She offers Tārācand Madhumālatī in marriage but he refuses, knowing she could only be happy with Manohar. Madhumālatī’s parents meanwhile write to Pemā telling her what has happened. Madhumālatī encloses a bārahmāśā, a song describing her suffering through the twelve months using exquisite natural and seasonal imagery. The letters reach Pemā just as Manohar reappears still disguised as a yogi. Further letters are exchanged and a marriage is arranged between Manohar and Madhumālatī. After the wedding ceremony, they consummate their long love-affair in full, much to the amusement of Madhumālatī’s girl friends. Tārācand stays with them both and one day he sees Pemā swinging in the picture-pavilion and falls in love with her although he does not know who she is. Madhumālatī realizes it must be Pemā he has fallen for and tells Manohar. Manohar says that since Pemā had been offered in marriage to him there was no difficulty in her being married to Tārācand. The marriage of Pemā and Tārācand takes place and after a while they all decide that they must return to their respective kingdoms. After an elaborate leave-taking, Manohar and Madhumālatī finally reach his kingdom where, amid great rejoicing, he is reunited with his happy parents.

This outline of Madhumālatī reveals an entertaining and sensuous love-story that is both Indian and Islamic in terms of narrative motifs, in common with the other texts of the genre. The plot moves through successive stages of deferred desire, driving the lovers and the audience along to the narrative, metaphysical, and erotic satisfaction of desire in the final union. The poet ends with a rhymed couplet that serves to round off the story and to justify its continued circulation, translation, and dissemination:

The elixir of immortality will fill love’s sanctuary, wherever it is found.
As long as poetry is cultivated on earth, so long will our lovers’ names resound.
Since poetry is still cultivated on earth, the sensitive reader (sahrdaya) will recognize that the Madhumālātī is a Sufi romance full of delightful imagery and narrative symmetry. Both pairs of lovers come together happily at the end to produce a beautifully balanced conclusion. The only two formal literary conventions in the story are the head-to-foot description of the heroine and the bārahmāsā, the rest being told with a lightness and sensitivity in keeping with the theme. The poem fully justifies Manjhan’s claim that it is pervaded with prema-rasa, the evocative rasa of love that is above all the rāja-rasa, the royal rasa or savour fit to be enjoyed by kings.

V. Mystical Meanings and Symbolism

The various Sufi stilts that composed Hindavi poetry in north India were fully steeped in the conventions and symbolism of the various genres of Persian poetry, both lyric (ghazal) and narrative (masnavi). At the same time, the Sufis were fascinated by the poetics and alluring imagery of Indian classical and regional poetry as they encountered it in musical and dance performances and in poetic recitation. The cultural history of sultanate and Mughal India is in part the history of the enthusiastic participation of Sufis and other Muslims in the formation of the canons of Indian poetry, art, and music. The genre of the Hindavi Sufi romance should be read against this larger historical background of cultural appropriations, comniglindings, and creative formulations. Thus, the Hindavi Sufi poets used Indian rasa theory and the conventions of Persian poetry to create a romantic genre centred around the various meanings of prema-rasa, the juice or essence of love. As we have seen, rasa means taste or essence, and was used in Indian poetic theory to refer to the property in a poem that evokes a trans-subjective emotional response in the hearer or reader. Rasa has at least two other meanings. At its core, the word means the physical juice, sap, or semen that runs through humans as well as the natural world. Secondly, this liquid essence or semen can be manipulated through certain yogic practices to produce mystical bliss.

When the Hindavi Sufi poets appealed to their readers as rasikas, they were able to combine the notion of the sahrādaya, a person of literary taste, refinement, and sensibility, with the notion of the ṣāḥīq, the lover, and the sālik, the seeker on the mystical path. There is a constant assertion through the prologues of the genre that these poems have multiple layers of significance. They are multivalent and multilayered, containing as many levels of meaning as there are levels in the soul of the reader to apprehend. Rather than straightforward allegory, which requires a point-to-point correspondence between levels of meaning, these works are full of multiple suggestions and resonances. As J. R. R. Tolkien notes in his introduction to his verse translation of the Middle English Pearl,

A clear distinction between ‘allegory’ and ‘symbolism’ may be difficult to maintain, but it is proper, or at least useful, to limit allegory to narrative, to an account (however short) of events; and symbolism to the use of visible signs or things to represent other things or ideas … To be an ‘allegory’ a poem must as a whole, and with fair consistency, describe in other terms some event or process; its entire narrative and all its significant details should cohere and work together to this end. There are minor allegories within Pearl … But an allegorical description of an event does not make that event itself allegorical. And this initial use is only one of the many applications of the pearl symbol … For there are a number of precise details in Pearl that cannot be subordinated to any general allegorical interpretation, and these details are of special importance since they relate to the central figure, the maiden of the vision, in whom, if anywhere, the allegory should be concentrated and without disturbance.

The Madhumālātī is ‘allegorical’ and ‘symbolic’ in this precise sense, containing a variety of suggestive incidents, an allegorical centrepiece in the form of the seductive divine heroine, a genuine poetic commitment to a range of poetic meanings, and a sense of the poem as a whole suggesting and evoking...

---

version of \textit{prema} is focused on self-recognition through the meditative practice of the divine Name.

The Hindavi Sufi poets fall somewhere in between these two poles. In their poems, the erotic body of the heroine signifies divinity in a temporary revelation that is intended to draw the seeker out of himself and on to the ascetic path. Since their metaphysics is focused on a transcendent principle that cannot be embodied, it is the journey of self-transformation and the balancing of this world and the hereafter that is central to their aesthetics. Since the Sufis believed in a notion of ordinate love, in which each object of desire is loved for the sake of the one higher to it, their poetry requires narrative stages in which the seeker advances towards the highest object through a series of ordeals. This is embodied in the erotic body of the heroine, allegorically understood to contain the concentrated blindness of Allah's divine revelation. Savouring the \textit{rasa} of the events and imagery of the story involves picking up these multiple resonances and allowing them to transform one's subjectivity.

Thus, the aesthetics of the Hindavi Sufi romances was aimed at suggesting and awakening love between a transcendent godhead and the human world through the circulation of love between human lovers. In this poetry there is an interplay between profane and divine love, where divine love is considered \textit{ishq-i haqiqi}, love of God, and human love is just a reflection of this spiritual or true love, being described as \textit{ishq-i majazi}, metaphorical or profane love. This set of distinctions, often referred to as ordinate love and defined as a ladder or progression in Sufi treatises, is apparent to us from the brief and scattered interpretative comments on the Hindavi romances in the Persian sources of the sultanate period. The beloved in Sufi poetry, as well as the lover, demons and ordeals, can all have at least a double reference but they cannot be understood schematically or allegorically. The symbolism is altogether more subtle, using suggestion and allusion to hint at symbolic levels which are co-present with the literal, so that in any one context, in any particular verse or passage, one level might be applicable, or two or several. The heroine is not always God, the beloved,
sometimes she is simply a beautiful woman, and sometimes she is both. Similarly the hero is sometimes a lovelorn young man, sometimes the human soul, sometimes a spiritual traveller, sometimes the created world, sometimes any two or three of these together. The richness of the symbol is measured by the number of levels of understanding and response it can evoke in the reader or hearer.

The text of the Madhumālati is richly allegorical and symbolic, outrunning the precise details of its allegory by the beauty and multivalence of the symbols used. In order to understand how this complex set of literary techniques, anchored in a poetics of rasa, is properly mystical, we need to turn the lens on another facet of the poem. In evoking the 'scent of the invisible world', the poet uses both allegorical events and symbolic excess. The classic writer on the theory of mysticism, Evelyn Underhill, defines symbols and their meanings very usefully: 'The greater the suggestive quality of the symbol used, the more answering emotion it evokes in those to whom it is addressed, the more truth it will convey. A good symbolisation, therefore, will be more than a mere diagram or mere allegory: it will use to the utmost the resources of beauty and passion, will bring with it hints of mystery and wonder, bewitch with dreamy periods the mind to which it is addressed. Its appeal will not be to the clever brain, but to the desirous heart, the intuitive sense, of man.'

When Manjhān addresses himself to the rasa of Manjhān addresses himself to the rasa, it is precisely this desirous heart and intuitive sense to which he is appealing. In her analysis, Underhill identifies three major classes of mystical symbols: that of the pilgrim or traveller on the way, the sālik; that of the lover searching for his Beloved, the 'āshiq; that of the seeker of inward transformation, the sādhak.

In the Madhumālati, Manjhān employs all three allegorically and intertwines them into a beautifully constructed narrative. The first level of symbolism is that of the sādhak, here the yogic level. In the genre of the Hindavi Sufi romance, the hero ordinarily disguises himself as a yogi when he sets off in search of the beloved. A number of key yogic terms are used to suggest the ascetic level of meaning through a coded vocabulary. The highest state is referred to as sahajā, the state of spontaneous bliss, wherein is experienced mahārāsa, the great rasa, the name of Madhumālati's city. Manjhān has a nurse called Sabajī, and Tārācand's city is called Pavanerī, which can be taken as indicative of pavana, breath. Pemā's city is called Citbirāgā, which means peacefulness or forgetfulness of mind, the objective of meditation. Pemā means love and the release of Pemā from the clutches of the demon could be taken as the hero's liberation of the abstract quality of love from the darkness of the phenomenal world into which she has fallen. In terms of the yogic system of self-mortification, it could also signify the release of saktī from the base of the spine so that it can rise up the psychic channel susumṇā to union with Śiva and thus bring about immortality. Finally, when Manjhān tells Madhumālati that he is the sun and she is the moon this too would be taken to refer to the two psychic channels, the īḍā and pingalā nādis that run on either side of the susumṇā. This yogic level of imagery and terminology is as explicitly a disguise as is the yogic appearance that Manjhān adopts when he sets off on his search. The assumption of Goraknāthī garb is as surely an indication of the translation of Islam into an Indian landscape as it is an allegorical sign of the seeker's self-transformation by the end of his quest. Manjhān has always shed his yogic guise, his deśī version of Islam, by the time he meets Madhumālati. In the final fairy-tale union, he is Islam internally and externally transformed into an Indian religious and literary world. The hero is the āshiq, the lover, and the sālik, the Sufi traveller on the path, conventional symbols of Sufi poetry which can now be examined.

Underhill further analysed the various stages of the mystical path, mainly on the basis of Christian mystics, although she does show some acquaintance with Muslim mystics as well. Her analysis is suggestive in that it creates a generalized scheme with four major phases that she called awakening, purification (via purgativa), illumination (via illuminativa), and union (via unitiva). While there is no historical connection between the Shaṭṭārī Sufis and the Christian mystics, the scheme helps us to

31 Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 126.
32 See Underhill, Mysticism, 125–48.
focus on the narrative stages of the awakening, purification, illumination, and consummation of desire in the Madhumālātī. Manohar must be understood as the human soul which is granted a foretaste of divine beauty in the form of Madhumālātī, whereupon love is born between them coming from a previous life. This is certainly a familiar situation in Indian poetry, where reincarnation is a presupposition, but in Islamic terms it must refer to a pre-existent state of love between the soul and God which is reawakened. This portion of the story, until the nymphs separate the couple, is the first stage, and could be said to correspond to the awakening of love.

The second stage, purification, begins when Manohar is overwhelmed by the pain of love in separation and becomes ill. Doctors, often symbolic of learning and rational thought (aql), fail to cure him because they do not understand love. All Manohar’s tribulations and sufferings are part of this purgation of the lower forces in his nature. This culminates in the moment when he is able to slay the demon and set love, Pemā, free, after which love becomes his guide, murshid, and leads him to his second meeting with Madhumālātī. This second encounter marks the third stage, that of illumination or gnosis, called mārifā in Sufi schemes of spiritual advancement. It takes place, significantly, in the picture-pavilion which is symbolic of the world of imaginal forms (ālam-i ımsāl). Here Manohar invites her to draw back the veil of her locks and Madhumālātī, for the first and only time, indicates that her beauty is something more than human beauty and cannot be seen with one’s ordinary eyes.

As we have mentioned, the poets of the genre use a coded vocabulary to suggest multiple levels of symbolism and meaning. For example, the location of Cittisaraṇa as a halting place (maqām) on the spiritual path is interesting, since the word can mean not only peace of mind but also forgetfulness. There is a sense in which this stage on the path is the point of greatest risk. Forgetfulness can translate as ghafālat, negligence, which is one of the greatest problems the Sufi traveller faces. When Manohar reaches Pemā’s home he is offered everything, including Pemā, but he resists the temptation because of his pledge to Madhumālātī; that is, he remembers his primary loyalty. A further temptation occurs in his meeting with Madhumālātī which they both recognize and reject, namely to make love fully as if they were married. They remember their former vow not to do so until they are married. Symbolically this signifies the recognition that illumination, mārifā, is not final union, that there is further to go on the path. Forgetfulness can also be taken as transcending the ordinary consciousness of the empirical world and enjoying ecstatic states, as Manohar does in their second encounter. Cittisaraṇa is therefore an excellent choice of name for the location of illumination since it is charged with symbolic potency indicative of both the high risk and the high reward of the traveller on the mystical path.

The transition between illumination and union, famously called ‘the dark night of the soul’ by St John of the Cross, is usually a barren despairing period in which both lover and beloved are not sure of the final outcome. The lovers are separated by Madhumālātī’s angry mother, who transforms her delinquent daughter into a bird by the use of a magic spell. The bird Madhumālātī, formerly the image and experience of God, flies about the world in a desperate quest for her lover Manohar. After a year, she allows herself to be caught by Tārācand, a Prince who resembles Manohar. At the yogic level of symbolism Tārācand is suggestive of breath, but in a Sufi sense he is representative of selflessness and disinterested service (khidmat-i khālaq). In the spirit of selfless service to Madhumālātī, he deserts his kingdom and does not expect any return for his devotion since the lovely and magical bird is already pledged to another. It was through love, Pemā, that Manohar was able to reach Madhumālātī, and now it is through the selflessness and devoted service of Tārācand that Madhumālātī is able to reach Manohar. Manjhan departs from the conventions of the genre at this point. He puts the bārahmāsā, the song of the pain of love in separation through the twelve months, in the mouth of Madhumālātī. The other romances usually have the bārahmāsā as a song sung by the deserted wife, who is usually taken to symbolize the lower self, the nafs, or the world, or both. In giving the bārahmāsā to Madhumālātī, Manjhan is able to demonstrate in a strong way—in that it departs from the
convention—the love and yearning of God for the human soul.

Manjhan handles the final stage of the consummation of desire, the ultimate savouring of prema-rasa, through a double denouement that uses the conventions of traditional Indian marriage. In the practice of child marriage, it was usual for the bride to remain with her parents after the ceremony until she reached the age of puberty. After this there was a second ceremony, the gavana or ‘going’, in which all goodbyes were said and she set out for her husband’s home after the ritual of consummation as a sexually mature woman.33 Union itself, as in other mystical literatures, is described in terms of both mystical marriage and of sexual union. After describing the grand marriage ceremony and the first night of union, Manjhan uses the time spent at her parents’ home to allow Pemā and Tārācand to fall in love and get married so that all four live together in perfect harmony. The second ceremony, the gavana, then takes place with leave-taking and goodbyes. In Madhumālatī’s case, this long goodbye includes her parents, relatives, friends and retainers, as well as the walls and ramparts, the bed, her clothes and her toys, that is, the entire conditioned world of materiality and relationship. All four set off, but, after a while, Pemā, human love, and Tārācand, selfless love and service, separate from the other two, since they cannot enter the totally unconditioned world to which Manohar and Madhumālatī are heir. Eventually Manohar reaches the kingdom from which he set out and becomes king in all his births. The cycle is complete; as the Sufis would say: ‘From God we come and to God shall we return.’ For Manohar and Madhumālati, as spiritual travellers and Sufi lovers, this return is represented in life and not in death.

Underneath this generalized Sufi symbolism, which can be understood as allegorical moments or stages along a mystical progression as well as a weaving together of levels of symbolism, it is possible to detect a specifically Shaṭṭārī set of resonances. The attentive reader will recall from our summary account of the Shaṭṭārī path that the neophyte tastes mystical absorption in the divine essence at the very beginning of his ascetic practice. In the poem at hand, this is signified by Manohar’s initial communion with Madhumālatī, the image of God and divine beauty in both its gentle (jāmālī) and its terrible (jālālī) aspects. The episode with the heavenly nymphs and the first meeting in which a pre-existent love is reawakened, which Manohar describes as both real and unreal at the same time, describes just this process. Thereafter, Manohar, suffering from viraha and with only the name of Madhumālatī, descends, step by step, to the phenomenal world where he finds the Princess whose name is love detained by the evil demon. The Name of God proves to be his salvation because Pemā, love, recognizes it as the name of her childhood friend. Through his victory over the demon, he is able to begin his ascent back up from this low point on the upward arc of the circular Shaṭṭārī regimen. With love as his guide, he is reunited with God but in the imaginal world of the picture-pavilion.

Up to this point the story has been that of Manohar, but now it is told from Madhumālatī’s point of view. It is as if the human soul can only hope to reach as far as illumination through its own efforts. Thereafter, only through selfless love and service is God able to reach the human soul and take it to union. In the other Sufi romances written within this genre, the heroes all die and their co-wives all commit satī on their husbands’ funeral pyres. This implies that men sacrifice women on the mystical path after spiritual self-transformation. In the cultural logic of the period and among the Sufis, the final sacrifice is taken as referring to fanā, the annihilation of self, a necessary process for every mystic. In the Madhumālatī, however, nobody dies. The Shaṭṭārī path reaches beyond fanā, the annihilation of egotistical selfhood, to baqā, subsistence in God, and finally to baqā al-baqā, everlasting reintegration in God, which is the culmination of Manjhan’s story. In this, as in the other ways that have been shown, the Shaṭṭārī path is
Introduction

distinctive. In going beyond *fanā* and using this unique double denouement, *Madhumālatī* transcends the other poems of this genre.

It should be remembered that the yogic, Sufi, and Shaṭṭārī levels of signification are not really discrete elements since the different symbols are all intertwined and perfectly merged with the literal imagery and narrative. The allegorical and complexly symbolical aesthetics of *prema-rasa* necessarily involve a communication of desire between lover and beloved, human and divine, and reader and text. Savouring the juice of love meant, for the authors and audiences of the Hindāvī Sufi romances, bringing all three relationships to consummation. Sufī authors considered that the form, shape, and potentiality for analogy of a story or situation had the power to settle in a reader and transform human understanding and consciousness. From all that has been said, it will be apparent that in the *Madhumālatī*, Manjhan composed a beautifully balanced and enchanting poem rich in its suggestive power and potential for mystical interpretation. It is hoped that this brief introduction will contextualize the work and its author and permit a more informed appreciation of the poem. We would like to emphasize, however, that the poem should be read and enjoyed as a rasika would read it, with an open heart, a discerning mind and a sensibility open to the poem's suggestive power.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

A famous dictum has it that one can never translate a poem, only rewrite it. Our work with Manjhan's *Madhumālatī* has aimed at recreating the poetic form of the text as closely as possible in English while conveying the lexical sense of the poetry accurately. Each verse of the poem consists of five short rhymed couplets, followed by a longer rhymed couplet summing up the point of the verse, somewhat reminiscent of the insistent 'bob and wheel' verse-structure of the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The second verse of *Madhumālatī* is transcribed below to show the structure and patterns of the poetry and its metres and rhymes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>eka aneka bhāva paramesā</th>
<th>eka rūpa kāchē bahu bhesā</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tīni loka jahā na laī ्ṣi ́</td>
<td>bhoga kai anabana rūpa gosāǐ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>karā krai jagata jeta cāhāi</td>
<td>jamu thā jamu rāhāi jamu āhaį</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bāju thāva berasa sabha thāį</td>
<td>nirguna eka omkāra gosāį</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gupta rūpa pargaṇa sabha thāį</td>
<td>bāhurūpa bahn urūpa gosāį</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trībhuvana pāri apāri kai</td>
<td>eka joti sabha thāva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joṭhī anabana mūrtaį, mūrtaį anabana nāva</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first line scans as follows:

```
- u u u u u u- - u u u u-
```

The line consists of two half-lines or *ardhālīs*, each having sixteen *mārtāṇ* or metrical instances and usually ending in a spondee (-). A short syllable, indicated by ω, is one *mārtāṇ*, and a long syllable, indicated by ω, counts as two *mārtāṇ*. This metre, in which there are two rhyming half-lines of sixteen *mārtāṇ* each, is called *caupāṇ*. Every verse of *Madhumālatī* is of five couplets in the *caupāṇ* metre followed by a longer rhyming couplet called a *dohā*. A *dohā* is two rhyming lines of twenty-four *mārtāṇ* each, with a pause or caesura, indicated above by a comma, after the first thirteen *mārtāṇ*. The first line of the *dohā* scans as follows:

```
- u u u u u- - u u u u-
```