

Boston University

OpenBU

<http://open.bu.edu>

BU Open Access Articles

BU Open Access Articles

2015-10-05

Reading the acts and lives of performers in Mughal Persian texts

Sharma, Sunil

Open Book Publishers

SHARMA, Sunil. 10. Reading the Acts and Lives of Performers in Mughal Persian Texts In: Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India

[online]. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015. Available at:

<http://books.openedition.org/obp/2518>. ISBN: 9782821876163.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/24019>

Boston University

Tellings and Texts

Music, Literature and Performance
in North India

*Edited by Francesca Orsini
and Katherine Butler Schofield*

OpenBook
Publishers 



<http://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield. Copyright of individual chapters is maintained by the chapters' authors.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work; to adapt the work and to make commercial use of the work providing attribution is made to the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Orsini, Francesca and Butler Schofield, Katherine (eds.), *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0062>

Further details about CC BY licenses are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit: <http://www.openbookpublishers.com/isbn/9781783741021#copyright>

All external links were active on 22/09/2015 and archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine: <https://archive.org/web/>

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <http://www.openbookpublishers.com/isbn/9781783741021#resources>

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-78374-102-1

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-103-8

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-78374-104-5

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-78374-105-2

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 9978-1-78374-106-9

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0062

King's College London has generously contributed to the publication of this volume.

Cover image: Late eighteenth-century miniature by Mir Kalan Khan (Awadh, c.1775). Photo by Pernille Klemp. © The David Collection, Copenhagen. Inventory no. 50/1981. All rights reserved.

Cover design by Heidi Coburn.

All paper used by Open Book Publishers is SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative) and PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes) Certified.

Printed in the United Kingdom and United States by Lightning Source
for Open Book Publishers

Contents

Acknowledgements	ix
Note on Transliteration	xi
Note on Dating Systems	xii
List of Illustrations	xiii
Notes on Contributors	xv
Introduction	1
<i>Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield</i>	
I. Between Texts and Practices	
1. The Example in Dadupanthi Homiletics	31
<i>Monika Horstmann</i>	
2. Making it Vernacular in Agra: The Practice of Translation by Seventeenth-Century Jains	61
<i>John E. Cort</i>	
3. World Enough and Time: Religious Strategy and Historical Imagination in an Indian Sufi Tale	107
<i>Muzaffar Alam</i>	
4. Hearing <i>Mo'jizat</i> in South Asian Shi'ism	137
<i>Amy Bard</i>	
II. Books and Performances, Books for Performance	
5. Note to Self: What Marathi <i>Kirtankars'</i> Notebooks Suggest about Literacy, Performance, and the Travelling Performer in Pre-Colonial Maharashtra	169
<i>Christian Lee Novetzke</i>	
6. A Handbook for Storytellers: The <i>Ṭirāz al-akhbār</i> and the <i>Qissa</i> Genre	185
<i>Pasha M. Khan</i>	

7. Did Surdas Perform the <i>Bhāgavata-purāṇa</i> ? <i>John Stratton Hawley</i>	209
8. Text, Orality, and Performance in Newar Devotional Music <i>Richard Widdess</i>	231
III. Written Clues about Performed Texts	
9. Listening for the Context: Tuning in to the Reception of <i>Riti</i> Poetry <i>Allison Busch</i>	249
10. Reading the Acts and Lives of Performers in Mughal Persian Texts <i>Sunil Sharma</i>	283
11. Persian Poets on the Streets: The Lore of Indo-Persian Poetic Circles in Late Mughal India <i>Stefano Pellò</i>	303
12. Texts and Tellings: <i>Kathas</i> in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries <i>Francesca Orsini</i>	327
13. A Curious King, a Psychic Leper, and the Workings of <i>Karma</i> : Bajid's Entertaining Narratives <i>Imre Bangha</i>	359
IV. Musical Knowledge and Aesthetics	
14. <i>Raga</i> in the Early Sixteenth Century <i>Allyn Miner</i>	385
15. Learning to Taste the Emotions: The Mughal <i>Rasika</i> <i>Katherine Butler Schofield</i>	407
16. Patterns of Composition in the Seventeenth-Century Bengali Literature of Arakan <i>Thibaut d'Hubert</i>	423
17. The Musical Lives of Texts: Rhythms and Communal Relationships among the Nizamis and Some of Their Neighbours in South and West Asia <i>Richard K. Wolf</i>	445
Glossary	485
Bibliography	493
Index	535

Acknowledgements

This volume brings together the papers presented at the third and final conference of the AHRC-funded project “North Indian Literary Culture and History from a Multilingual Perspective: 1450-1650”, which Francesca ran at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) between 2006-2009 and in which Katherine was intimately involved from start to finish. The conference was initially entitled “Tellings, Not Texts”, but over the course of the three days it became clear that texts were very much involved in many of the performance forms and traditions we were discussing, hence the change of title. (The first conference volume, *After Timur Left*, came out in 2014 from Oxford University Press, New Delhi, co-edited by Francesca and Samira Sheikh.) We would first of all like to thank the AHRC for its generous support. The conference, which took place on 8-10 June 2009, benefited from a British Academy conference support grant, for which we are also grateful, as we are to the European Research Council which supported Katherine’s contributions in the latter stages. We would like here to heartily thank all the contributors for their patience and good humour as we asked for more and more changes. We thank Alessandra Tosi for her enthusiasm and welcome, and Dr David Lunn for careful copy-editing. Our dear friend Aditya Behl helped plan the conference and was supposed to come, but was in the end too ill to travel. He died, tragically young, two months later. We would like to dedicate the volume to him, for he remains in our thoughts and in our love.

FO and KBS
London and Cambridge, July 2015

10. Reading the Acts and Lives of Performers in Mughal Persian Texts

Sunil Sharma

In classical Persian literary culture, despite the primacy of the written word, the recitation of texts was as important, if not more so, than reading books. Extemporaneous or rehearsed performances of verses in a *musha'ira* (poetry contest), declamation of formal *qasidas* in a courtly setting, and listening to tales in prose or in mixed forms were part and parcel of the lives of rulers, princes, and courtiers. And although participation in literary activities, including the recitation of poetry, was part of the accomplishments of every educated person, there were various classes of professionals associated with poetry. On the highest level were the professional court poets who composed verses, and then, with some overlap, there was a special professional class of people whose oral skills were prized for various reasons, whether for their mellifluous voice, physical beauty, place of origin, or connection to powerful people. At the most formal level, court poets continued the age-old tradition of composing and declaiming long panegyrics (*qasidas*) in praise of the sultan or another highly placed patron, often on festive occasions such as 'Id al-fitr and Nawroz or to mark a military victory. Poets who were gifted declaimed their own laudatory poems, while some would have their poems read by a professional declaimer (*ravi*). To mark other special events such as births, deaths, completion of buildings, etc., poets composed poems containing chronograms (*tarikhs*), or just the chronogram itself, that may have been part of an oral culture as well.

In studying the topic of orality in early Mughal Persian culture, the influence of the earlier Timurid forms of literary production is discernable

in the way texts were produced and performed at court. Local performative practices, especially in the fields of music, dance, and Hindi, Urdu, and Persian poetry, gradually became an essential part of this repertoire.¹ While textual sources, and to some extent the visual archive in the form of paintings from manuscripts,² provide us with details about the setting and performers of texts, it is also possible to piece together information about both the normative and experiential aspects of oral culture through the lives of the people who were involved in these activities, whether they were patrons and listeners, or poets and performers. My focus here will be to read the fragmentary information about these lives within the larger context of the Mughal Persian literary culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in an effort to improve our understanding of the place and the range of oral performance and oral performers of Persian literature at court, and at times beyond it.

Already Amir 'Unsur al-Ma'ali Kay Kavus (d.1098), in his eleventh-century *Mirror for Princes*, *Qābūsnāma*, discusses the subject of the oral culture of texts in some detail. Although dating from an early period in Northern Iran, this influential work offers insight into the normative rules on oral culture that also apply to courtly Persianate societies of later times. In chapters 35-38, the duties of a poet, musician, courtier, and boon companion are described, since all poets were ideally expected to be able to supply material for conversation and quotation. To the poet the author

1 My study is limited to the courtly culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for the reason that there was a major shift in practice of oral texts in the late seventeenth century. I refer at the end to the eighteenth-century *Muraqqa'-yi Dihli*, a unique work that contains biographies of singers and performers of mid-eighteenth century Mughal Delhi, seen from the point of view of the author, Dargah Quli Khan, a visitor from the Deccan. The change from earlier sources is that the descriptions of performances are now largely non-courtly and the settings much more socially diverse, suggesting that a new audience of townsmen and bourgeois gentlemen had emerged by the eighteenth century. In her study on this period, Katherine Schofield's remarks on the musical *mahfil* have some bearing for the transformation in the culture of poetic performances in general, as when she draws attention to "the changed relationship between patron and musician in one of the most exclusive of Mughal male social spaces, the princely *mehfil*"; Katherine Butler Brown (now Schofield), 'If Music be the Food of Love: Masculinity and Eroticism in the Mughal *Mehfil*', in *Love in South Asia: A Cultural History*, ed. by F. Orsini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 65.

2 Many such visual representations of performances and performers from the Mughal period can be found in Bonnie Wade, *Imaging Sound: An Ethnomusicological Study of Music, Art and Culture in Mughal India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Women are mostly absent in these sources except as dancers, but their participation as poets and performers emerges in the eighteenth-century sources.

advises, “Learn anecdotes, rare quips and amusing tales in abundance, and repeat them to your patron”.³ To the musician he says, “[E]xert yourself to become a *raconteur*; by telling a number of stories, witticisms and jests you can rest yourself and diminish the strain of minstrelsy”; he adds that “minstrels are rhapsodists for poets in general and not mere reciters of their own verse”.⁴ In connection with the duties of a boon companion, the author cautions, “[Y]ou should be a *raconteur*, retaining in your memory a large number of anecdotes, jests and clever witticisms; a boon companion without stories and quips is imperfectly equipped”.⁵ These statements illustrate the pervasiveness of the spoken word in daily courtly life, and in multilingual Persianate societies the complexities of interaction would have increased significantly due to individuals from different social groups with differing artistic preferences and knowledge of Persian.

Closer in time to the Mughals, in a normative work from the late Timurid period by Husain Va’iz Kashifi (d.1504), the *Futuwwat-nāma-yi Sulṭānī*, the author prescribes both reading and listening to stories as beneficial activities for people in general.⁶ In a section of the chapter on the class of eloquent men (*maddāḥān* and *ghurra-khwānān*), Kashifi prescribes rules to professional performers for the recitation of both prose and poetic works.⁷ Kashifi avers that the purpose of reading and listening to stories about the past is didactic. In terms of delivery, the author recommends a modulated approach to reciting works so that they are pleasing, comprehensible, and captivating. The short prescriptive guidelines, although written in a sufi milieu, would also have ramifications for Mughal courtly culture and can help us better understand the state of oral literary culture in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Agra, Delhi, and Lahore.

3 Kay Kavus, *A Mirror for Princes, The Qābūs nāma*, trans. by Reuben Levy (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1951), p. 185.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

6 Husayn Va’iz Kashifi, *The Royal Book of Spiritual Chivalry (Futuwwat nāmah-yi sulṭānī)*, trans. by Jay R. Crook (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2000). For a practitioner’s manual on storytelling, see Khan’s essay in this volume on ‘Abd al-Nabi Fakhr al-Zamānī’s *Ṭirāz al-akhbār*, dating from Emperor Jahangir’s time (r.1605-1628).

7 Kashifi (2000), pp. 296-98. In a more courtly milieu and in earlier times, the role of the storyteller “was significantly different from that of the poet and the minstrel.... He was not allowed to perform on formal occasions, in which the poet and minstrel played important parts. The storyteller neither recited poetry nor sang songs, which was done by the minstrel. Instead, his principal duties consisted of telling, by implication, prose stories in the evening and delivering messages”, Kumiko Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 56.

The brief biographical notices of professionals in various artistic fields in the Mughal period suggest that in fact Persian court poets often did double or triple duty as musicians, storytellers, and calligraphers (see also Pellò in this volume). Biographical dictionaries (*tazkiras*) from the Timurid, Safavid, and Mughal periods attest to the widespread practice of composing poetry across social and communal groups in the Persianate realm.⁸ Paul Losensky has noted the wider social spread of Persian poetry in the fifteenth century and the importance of multi-talented poets:

The sociological growth of poetry begun in the Timurid-Turkmen period continued unabated in the following two and a half centuries of Safavid and Mughal rule [...] Private homes, *khanqahs* and mosques, small shops in the bazaar and, in Safavid times, coffeeshops all served as forums for this new class of poets. [...] This new popularity of poetry among craftsmen and shopkeepers was matched by a widespread and burgeoning enthusiasm for writing verse at all levels of court society. Some knowledge of literature and an ability to improvise a few verses had long been a desirable talent among the king's boon companions (*nudamā*), but in Timurid-Turkmen times fluency in the poetic tradition became one of the expected accomplishments of any member of the court. We thus find numerous artists and artisans attached to the court—engravers, calligraphers, and musicians—who also achieved recognition as poets. Professional poets conversely were often noted for their competence in other art forms.⁹

But if it was true that every person educated in Persian was also a part-time poet, it would have been a smaller number who would have been active as professional poets, and what was true for Safavid Iran, where Persian was not only an elite language, may not have been true of Mughal India, where Persian always remained a learnt language.

What is also apparent is that performers who may not have been part of the elite Persophone element at court, i.e. Indians rather than Central Asians or Iranians, were only cursorily mentioned by Mughal Persian writers, perhaps because their accomplishments were not sufficiently of interest for an audience in the larger Persianate world, in an elitist cultural milieu where place of origin and the register of language used were prized attributes. In the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, the historian and biographer of the Emperor Akbar (r.1556-1605), Abu'l Fazl, writes that there were Indians, Iranians,

8 Paul Losensky discusses some of these in detail in his book, *Welcoming Fighani: Imitation, Influence, and Literary Change in the Persian Ghazal, 1480-1680* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1993).

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.

Turanian, and Kashmiris, both men and women, among the musicians at court. He provides a list of thirty-six male musicians (*khunyāgarān*), twenty of whom sing (*gūyanda*) or chant (*khwānanda*), or do both.¹⁰ Twenty-three among the singers in Abu'l Fazl's list were of Indian origin (from Gwalior, Dhar, Agra, Multan, and Malwa), six from Khorasan (Herat, Mashhad), and one was a Qipchaq. No biographical account of them is provided here, although people like Miyan Tansen and Baz Bahadur were well-known figures of the time.

The place of origin of these individuals was important because, as the Safavid historian Iskandar Munshi in *Ālamārā-yi 'Abbāsī* writes, "the best singers came from Iraq and the best chanters from Khorasan".¹¹ It is likely that to a certain extent the same value was attached to these places in Mughal India, especially since native speakers were considered the arbiters of Persian usage. The poet Liva'i Pirzada-yi Sabzavari is an example of someone who both sang and chanted. He is also mentioned by 'Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni in the *Muntakhab al-tavārikh* as being "peerless in the valley of song and chanting" [*dar vādī-i naḡhma u surūd bī-'adīl būd*].¹² As the name of this singer indicates, Sabzavari was of Iranian stock, and being from the Persian heartland probably helped raise his position among the ranks of singers.

Storytelling and Storytellers

Mughal sources inform us that the Emperor Akbar was fond of listening to all kinds of stories, whether of Islamic-Persian or Indian origins, and he was also somewhat of a storyteller himself. In discussing his library, Abu'l Fazl notes that books in Hindavi, Persian, Greek, Kashmiri, and Arabic, in both prose and poetry formed part of the royal library:

From day to day experts present books to the emperor who hears every book from beginning to end. Every day he marks the spot where they have reached with his pearl-strewing pen. He rewards the readers with gold and silver according to the number of pages read. There are few well-known books that are not read in the royal assembly. Which are the ancient stories

10 Abu'l Fazl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, ed. by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (reprint, Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 2005), p. 251.

11 Iskandar Munshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas the Great, Tārīk-e Ālamārā-ye 'Abbāsī*, trans. by Roger M. Savory (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978), Vol. 1, p. 281.

12 'Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni, *Muntakhab al-tavārikh*, ed. by Maulvi Ahmad 'Ali Sahib and Taufiq Subhani (Tehran: Anjuman-i Asar va Mafakhir-i Farhangi, 2000-2001), p. 219.

(*dāstānhā-yi bāstānī*), curiosities of science (*gharā'ib-i 'ulūm*), or fine points of philosophy (*navādir-i hikam*), which the leader of wise men does not appreciate? He does not tire of hearing a book again and again, but listens with great interest. The *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* [by Tusi], the *Kīmiyā-yi sa'adat* [by Ghazzali], the *Qābūs-nāma*, the letters of Sharaf Maneri, the *Gulistān* [by Sa'di], the *Ḥadīqa* by Hakim Sana'i, the *Maṣnavī-i ma'navī* [by Rumi], the *Jām-i jam* [by Auhadi], the *Būstān* [by Sa'di], the *Shāhnāma* [by Firdausi], the *khamṣa* of Shaikh Nizami, the *kullīyāt*s of [Amir] Khusrau and Maulana Jami, the *dīvāns* of Khaqani, Anvari, and other history books are read out to him.¹³

This canonical list of classical Persian prose and poetic works, however, reads remarkably like a curriculum of a Persian literature programme of study, and it is through listening to these texts that Akbar sought to educate himself and the court. If it was true that Akbar was illiterate, it would explain why he was fond of *listening* to this broad range of classical Persian texts. In the *Akbarnāma*, Abu'l Fazl states that, "Among books of poetry, he recites Rumi's *Maṣnavī* and Hafiz's *divan* fluently and finds pleasure in their meaningful and enjoyable aspects".¹⁴

Not all the books on this list would have been conducive to reading aloud, nor were they usually used in that way. Works like the *Shāhnāma* and the *Gulistān* were meant to be read aloud in sections, though their orality was accompanied by an equal value placed on these works as books, and it was usually through the copying and use of manuscripts of these texts that they were transmitted with the seals of the members of the royal family and nobility. As we shall see below, in the Mughal context storytelling, poetic recitation, and discussion also functioned as forms of re-enacting and validating the canon in the face of new literary developments and challenges, especially when it came to poetry.

One of Akbar's favourite stories was the popular romance (*dastan*) of Amir Hamza, the uncle of the prophet Muhammad, which also enjoyed immense popularity in Urdu literary culture in later centuries. Such tales provided entertainment not only when the court was in residence in the capital city, but also while it was on the move. Abu'l Fazl writes that after a hunting expedition in Malwa in 1564, "for the sake of delight and pleasure he [Akbar] listened for some time to Darbar Khan's recital of the story of

13 *Ā'im-i Akbarī* (2005), p. 96. All translations in this paper are mine unless otherwise indicated in the bibliographic reference.

14 Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, ed. by Agha Ahmad Ali and Maulawi Abd-ur-Rahim (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873), Vol. 1, p. 271.

Amir Hamza".¹⁵ Akbar is said to have been so fond of this text that "inside the palace he even recited it in the style of the storytellers".¹⁶ It was the extreme enjoyment of the emperor in listening to and performing this narrative work that led to the production of a lavishly illustrated manuscript of the *Hamzanāma*.¹⁷ The extremely large paintings from this manuscript attest to their use in performances of the text, in which the pictures functioned as visual aids. In a study on oral aspects of Persian *dastans*, Julia Rubanovich concludes that such stories "were composed in writing by authors who were part and parcel of the world of medieval literacy".¹⁸ Thus, in all aspects of the production and performance of stories, certain literary standards had to be met.

Akbar's pleasure in listening to the recitation of the adventurous tales from the *Hamzanāma* would have been enhanced by the performance of the reciter, Mulla 'Inayat Darbar Khan, whose biography was later recorded in the eighteenth-century biographical dictionary of Mughal nobles, *Ma'āṣir al-'umarā* by Shahnavaz Khan. Shahnavaz Khan writes that the emperor "favoured literary gatherings" [*tavajjuh bi-majālis būd*], but apparently those where storytelling was the chief entertainment rather than *musha'iras*. His biographical account of Darbar Khan stressed the lineage and status of the storyteller-cum-courtier, and the remarkable closeness he enjoyed with the emperor:

Darbar Khan: Inayat-fam, son of the story-teller (*qiṣṣa-khwān*) Taklu Khan, who was specialised in story-telling in the service of the Safavid Shah Tahmasp [r.1525-1576] and was the object of a variety of royal favours. When his son entered India he distinguished himself in the same hereditary manner by the fortune of intercourse in the service of the felicitous 'Arsh Ashiyani [Akbar]. He was rewarded with a *mansab* of 700 and the title of Darbar Khan. In the fourteenth year after the victory of Ranthambor, when the emperor

15 Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, ed. by Agha Ahmad Ali and Maulawi Abd-ur-Rahim (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, *Akbarnāma*, 1881), Vol. 2, p. 223.

16 "*hattā kih khoud andarūn-i maḥal bi-taur-i qiṣṣa-khwānān mīguft*", Shahnavaz Khan, *Ma'āṣir al-'umarā*, ed. by Maulvi 'Abd al-Rahim (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1888), Vol. 2, p. 2.

17 For the Mughal manuscript of this work, see John Seyller, *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2002). Shahnavaz Khan (1888, p. 3) goes on to describe the production of this sumptuous volume.

18 Julia Rubanovich, 'Tracking the *Shahnama* Tradition in Medieval Persian Folk Prose', in *Shahnama Studies II: The Reception of Firdausi's Shahnama*, ed. by Charles Melville and Gabrielle van den Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 660.

left for pilgrimage of the shrine at the Dar al-Khair Ajmer, due to a severe illness Darbar Khan left for the Dar al-Khilafa Agra. Upon reaching there he quit the mortal world. Since 'Arsh Ashiyani was very attentive towards him he was greatly saddened.¹⁹

The account goes on to narrate that in his will Darbar Khan asked to be buried near the tomb of Akbar's faithful dog, who had predeceased him, thus indicating the high degree of intimacy between him and the emperor that would not have been possible for all literati at court. Darbar Khan's authentic credentials as a native speaker of Persian, as an Iranian, and as the son of someone who had served the Safavid ruler as reciter would certainly have elevated him above others and helped him obtain his position at Akbar's court, and it was thus that he came to be included in a biographical dictionary of nobles.

From the early Mughal period we encounter the names of at least two other such storytellers, Iskandar of Iraq and Mir Muhammad Hashim of Badakhshan, whose lives are recorded in the biographical section of 'Abd al-Baqi Nihavandi's *Ma'āṣir-i Raḥīmī*, a work completed in 1616 for his patron, the Mughal general 'Abd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan. Nihavandi describes the Khan-i Khanan's interest in storytelling in several languages: "He also knows the stories and traditions of the Turks better than those people such that he likes to listen to tales and stories to induce sleep; sometimes they are recited in his presence in Turki, sometimes in Hindi, sometimes in Persian".²⁰ A portion of this work recorded the lives of notables in Mughal service, including religious men and poets.²¹ The reason that notices of the lives of the two storytellers, *qissa-khwan* and *afsana-gu* respectively, made it into this work is because they were also professional poets. Nihavandi writes thus about Hashim:

Mir Muhammad Hashim, the storyteller (*qiṣṣa-khwān*): His lineage is from the exalted *sayyids* of Badakhshan. He was adorned with perfect talent and

19 Shahnavaḥ Khan (1888), Vol. 2, pp. 1-2.

20 'Abd al-Baqi Nihavandi, *Ma'āṣir-i Raḥīmī*, ed. by M. Hidayat Husain (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1925), Vol. 2, pp. 590-91.

21 The biographical part of the work was published in a new edition recently. John Seyller's point about artists' biographies in this work also extends to those of performers, "'Abd al-Bāqī often indicates an area of expertise within a particular field—especially in calligraphy—but never cites distinctive qualities of the individual's work, let alone specific examples. Indeed, the second-hand nature of most of his information is highlighted by his eagerness to corroborate his statements with his own personal testimony whenever possible"; Seyller (2002), p. 53. This is characteristic of many kinds of *tazkiras* from this period.

used the pen-name “Muhtaram”. He is a peerless storyteller of and also has complete mastery in poetry. In the time when this general of kingly qualities was occupied with the conquest of Gujarat and lived in that province, he [Hashim] was appointed in his retinue of slaves and servants. For a long time Mulla Mulhami Shirazi, one of the special attendants of the general, used to say that the Mir was in the service of the lofty and victorious cavalry for ten years, and according to some reports another eight years in this person’s service. He was a panegyrist, storyteller, master of the stables (*alūfa*) and *jāgīrdār*. Now in the year 1024 (1615) he is in Golconda.²²

This account shows a remarkable degree of social mobility for someone who was a poet and entertainer in the first place, but his social background played clearly to his advantage in furthering his career. This is also seen in the case of the biographical sketch of the second performer, Iskandar, who was in the service of Emperor Jahangir:

Iskandar the storyteller is from Iraq and is said to be among the eloquent and sweet-tongued. He recites (*mīkhwānad*) and performs (*adā minumāyad*) old stories and fictional tales (*bāstānī qīṣṣa-hā va afsāna-hā-yi ghair-i vāqī’ī*) written by men of good temperament and taste in such a way puts on airs that he is praised by experts and literati. Out of the delicacy of his nature and personal poise, he also displays finesse in his poetic style. Every time that he engages in wonderful innovations he does not refrain from his own sayings and embellishes with other styles as well. Presently he has the high-ranking position of candle and lamp of the Emperor Nur al-Din Muhammad Jahangir. He considers himself one of the panegyrists and well-wishers of the general and is said to have composed lustrous verses in praise of him.²³

In all three cases the storytellers hailed from the central Iranian heartland, with their credentials as native Persian speakers in their favour.²⁴ One can infer that it was facility with the language that was a selling point rather than simply pronunciation, but a native speaker’s authority was certainly something that native Persian speakers would have exploited. This is a compelling argument in light of the fact that, as far as the textual evidence shows, no other individual, especially of Indian origin, was accorded

22 ‘Abd al-Baqi (1931), Vol. 3, pp. 1004-05.

23 Ibid., p. 1242.

24 On the subject of native speakers of Persian at the Mughal court, see Muzaffar Alam, ‘The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics’, *Modern Asian Studies* 32.2 (1998), 341. Jean Calmard mentions the “unidirectional flow” of such professionals at this time, ‘Safavid-Persia in Indo-Persian Sources and in Timurid-Mughal Perception’, in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, ed. by Muzaffar Alam, Françoise “Nalini” Delvoye, and Marc Gaborieau (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), p. 355.

such honours. In both the cases he mentions, the biographer Nihavandi recorded their original compositions in Persian and highlighted their role primarily as panegyric poets (*maddahan*) in the service of the emperor and of his own patron, the Khan-i Khanan. As with Darbar Khan, in the *tazkiras* these two storytellers appear as professional poets first, though their skill at storytelling was clearly much prized by the Mughal court.

Recitation and Narrative Texts

When it came to poetic texts, it seems that portions of long narrative poems were frequently recited aloud, but actually we know less about the use of narrative *masnavis* in an oral context, apart from those mentioned by Abu al-Fazl as Akbar's favourite works. The fact that many Mughal poets, especially during Shah Jahan's period (r.1628-1656), wrote short topical poems in this form suggests that they were meant to be recited, and that these poems gradually replaced the ceremonial *qasida* as the traditional poetic form to mark formal occasions.

As for the *Shāhnāma*, whereas in Safavid Iran *shahnama-khwans* were a popular sub-group of storytellers,²⁵ in North India reading parts of the epic rather than reciting it seemed to be the prevalent practice. In Iran, professional reciters of the epic summarised the most dramatic parts, such as the feats of the hero Rustam, in their own words with occasional and appropriate quotations from Firdausi's original text. In the Iranian lands

25 "The real flourishing of storytelling as an art of entertainment came in the Safavid period... here we see a more obvious mingling of the courtly and common threads of storytelling", Mary E. Page, '*Naqqāli and Ferdowsi: Creativity in the Iranian National Tradition*' (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1977), p. 128, quoted in Karin Rührdanz, 'About a Group of Truncated *Shāhnāmas*: A Case Study in the Commercial Production of Illustrated Manuscripts in the Second Part of the Sixteenth Century', *Muqarnas* 14 (1997), 119, who discusses the influence of oral narratives on textual production and illustration of manuscripts. Also see Yamamoto (2003), pp. 20-28, for the practice of storytelling and coffeehouses; she writes, "Little research has been done on the social background of the storytellers. In general, they came from the middle to lower classes" (p. 23). Rubanovich's study of the use of the epic in folk literature is enlightening; she cautions, "in contrast to the court literature, the fortunes of the *Shahnama* in medieval Persian folk literature remain elusive and neglected. Generalised assertions as to the epic's broad popularity in oral tradition are based mainly on scant and mostly oblique references to *shahnama-khwans* and *shahnama-khvaani* in medieval sources and do not take into account the diachronic development of the reception of the *Shahnama*"; (2012), p. 11.

Firdausi's epic carried connotations of national identity, while in Mughal India the *Shāhnāma* probably never had the same cultural associations for Indian audiences as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* did. Tales from the *Shāhnāma* may have been read as a standard classical text, and perhaps occasionally performed as a form of entertainment, but not as a national epic. Several condensed versions of the *Shāhnāma* appeared in Mughal India in a mixed prose and verse (prosimetrum) form that included the heroic stories popular in India but excluded the more obscure historical parts.²⁶

But the *Shāhnāma* also acted as a template, and imitations of Firdausi's epic were produced by court poets in India who replaced the epic heroes with contemporary figures.²⁷ A poet named Manzari Samarqandi composed one the many pseudo-*Shāhnāmas*, i.e. a continuation or imitation of Firdausi's poem, on the battle between Sikandar Sur and the Mughals. Bada'uni tells us that the general Bairam Khan suggested some corrections be made to the text, which is not extant, and in one night the poet revised the poem of 300-400 couplets and in the morning recited it in an assembly.²⁸ The Emperor Shah Jahan was particularly interested in literary works that included contemporary history, and his court poets produced at least two *Shāhnāma*-like epics to honour him, parts of which may have been read aloud at court.

Due to its mystical contents and its appeal to a more universally Muslim audience, Jalaluddin Rumi's *Maṣnavī-yi ma'navī* was known in Mughal India across multiple social levels. According to Annemarie Schimmel, Indo-Persian works "contain much information about famous *mathnavi-khwāns* who excelled in the recitation of Rumi's verses. Among them we may mention a certain Sayyid Sa'dollah Purabi (d.1726) who wrote a *resāla-ye chehel beyt-e Mathnavi*".²⁹ The Emperor Aurangzeb's

26 See Brittany Payeur, 'The Lilly Shamshir Khani in a Franco-Sikh Context: A Non-Islamic "Islamic" Manuscript', in *The Islamic Manuscript Tradition: Ten Centuries of Book Arts in Indiana University Collections*, ed. by Christiane Gruber (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 221-48; and Pasha M. Khan, 'Marvelous Histories: Reading the *Shāhnāmah* in India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49.4 (2012), 527-56.

27 See Sunil Sharma, 'Amir Khusraw and the Genre of Versified History', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 22.1 (2003), 112-18.

28 Bada'uni (2000-2001), Vol. 3, p. 233.

29 Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalaluddin Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 377.

(r.1658-1707) fondness for Rumi's *Masnavī* is mentioned in an anecdote involving the Qadiri sufi Mulla Shah Badakhshi (d.1661), who fell out of favour with the emperor for having been closely associated with his rival Dara Shikoh.³⁰ Although such anecdotal evidence suggests that Rumi's work was occasionally recited in both courtly and non-courtly settings, among the larger populace it was, like other *masnavis*, probably more part of a reading culture than an oral one.³¹ In the end, there is not sufficient evidence to explore this issue in depth.

Much more is known about the performance of the *ghazal*, the privileged poetic form of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whose recitation and practice were not limited to elite gatherings and included alternative settings such as gatherings of sufis, women, and general townspeople. As mentioned above, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed a large-scale broadening of the literary communities, with poets emerging from all classes of society. This is specifically linked to the rise of the *ghazal* genre, as Losensky explains:

The social spread of poetry, for example, is generally accounted to be a major factor in the rapidly growing popularity of the *ghazal*. The lyric was *the* genre of choice of the new class of amateur poets, among both the urban classes and courtiers, and makes up the bulk of poetic citations found in the *tazkirahs*. The panegyric *qasidah* was too closely associated with courtly politics and ritual to have much appeal outside of this context, while the narrative *masnavi* was usually too lengthy for the literary assemblies in which most poetry was now presented and received. For the most part, the *ghazal* does not demand the time or leisure required by the other major genres.³²

Mughal sources mention a few examples of this social spread of poetry (see Pellò in this volume), but these are fewer than in Iran and Central Asia.

30 "Kabil Khan [Shaikh Abu al-Fath, *munshī al-mamālik*], one of his [Mulla Shah's] friends, said to him one day, 'Formerly our sovereign Aurangzeb loved to listen to discourses on the subject of mysticism, and I have often had the honour of reading before him passages from the *Masnavi* of Jalaluddin Rumi. The Emperor was often so touched by them that he shed tears; certainly when he comes to Lahore he will wish to see you'. 'No', replied Mullah Shah; 'we shall never see him...'" ; Claud Field, *Mystics and Saints of Islam* (London: F. Griffiths, 1910), p. 64.

31 For the larger subject of the reception of Rumi's works in India, see Franklin Lewis, *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teaching and Poetry of Jalāl al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), p. 470.

32 Losensky (1993), p. 142.

One poet with a direct link to the old culture of Timurid Herat, Qasim Kahi (d.1580), the last disciple of the great poet-mystic Jami (d.1492), was brought to Delhi by the Emperor Humayun (r.1530-1540, 1555-1556). Bada'uni did not approve of the poet's antinomian ways and association with dervishes, courtesans, and especially dogs, and accused him of plagiarising ideas from other poets. But he records that Kahi wrote on music and sang in a good voice, so that some lines of his *ghazals* became the rage and were recited in assemblies.³³

Despite the popularity of the *ghazal* form, the social origins of the *ghazal* poet were as important as his poetic talent, especially if he planned to gain access to royal courts and generous patrons. In Pritchett's words, "the whole interlocked literary culture of *ustad*, *shagird*, and *mushairah* documented in the *tazkirahs* was primarily devoted to the cultivation of the *ghazal* as an elite oral performance genre".³⁴ Thus, Bada'uni notes that the poet Qasim 'Ali "Ghubari", who was very handsome and used to sing at social gatherings and had pretensions to be a Quraishi, used to be embarrassed that his father was a grocer.³⁵ Social mobility and the importance of lineage are both in evidence here, in mutual tension.

Thus poetic assemblies or *musha'iras* were the occasions for complex forms of social interaction. As Pritchett puts it, they "were not only complex competitive arenas and technical workshops but hothouses of gossip and general social rivalry as well".³⁶ In addition, "[i]mpromptu composition was highly valued, and many opportunities were available for the poet to show his skill".³⁷ A single line from a *ghazal* would suffice as the text for an entire performance and give pleasure to its listeners, some of whom would remember and record it in their notebooks. At least from the eleventh century onwards Persian *ghazals* were performed in sufi

33 Bada'uni (2000-2001), pp. 120-23. Of another poet, Bahram 'Saqqa', a disciple of Shaikh Muhammad Khabhushani, Bada'uni writes that he would wander the streets of Agra with his disciples, giving water to the thirsty as he recited verses. He compiled several of his *divans* but when he was overcome by religious ecstasy (*jazba*) he would wash the pages of his notebooks one by one (p. 168).

34 Frances Pritchett, 'A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part 2', in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. by Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 905.

35 Bada'uni (2000-2001), p. 198.

36 Pritchett (1993), p. 894.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 899; see also Busch in this volume.

khanqahs, and in the case of Amir Khusrau (d.1325) the same poem could be courtly or mystical depending on the context of its performance.³⁸

Singing Verses, Discussing Poetry

Whereas his father had been fond of listening to stories, Jahangir seemed to have been particularly fond of *ghazal* performances.³⁹ Anecdotes relating to them show that even as the *majlis* served as the social backdrop for the recitation of poems, mainly of classical poets, it was here that a negotiation over the value of individual poets took place. In his *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, a detailed and intimate record of sessions with the emperor dating from 2 November 1608 to 24 November 1611, 'Abd al-Sattar Qasim Lahori writes that during the 105th *majlis* on 10 August 1611, at bedtime all kinds of singers and musicians (*qawwālān va kalāvāntān va dīgar gūyandagān*) gathered before the ruler.⁴⁰ Among them were two brothers, Maku and Hamza, popular court *qawwals*, who sang a certain quatrain (*dubaitī*). The emperor asked who had composed it (*bar zabān-i mubārak raft ki īn shi'r az kīst?*). Maku informed him that it was by the poet Mushfiqi. The emperor asked where he was from (*Mushfiqi kujā'ī būd?*). The answer was that he was from Bukhara. Having satisfied the emperor's curiosity, they sang this one verse for an hour. The emperor discussed the meaning of the verse and then recited a verse of Baba Fighani (d.1519), a poet who brought in the vogue for what would be later called the *taza-gu'i* or *sabk-i Hindi* poetry.⁴¹ During the 104th *majlis* on 11 August 1611, the emperor asked everyone present who was the greater poet: Sa'di or Hafiz, not in terms of mastery over the *ghazal* because he knew it was the former, but in terms of mysticism (*darvīshī*) and piety (*khudāparastī*).⁴²

Anecdotes such as these suggest that oral recitation of poetry also played a role in the process of the canonisation of certain classical figures in the

38 See e.g. Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusrau: The Poet of Sufis and Sultans* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), pp. 41-42.

39 He also appreciated storytelling. In his memoirs, Jahangir mentions the *qissa-khwan* Mulla Asad who had previously been in the service of Mirza Ghazi the governor of Sindh in Thatta; Jahangir, *Jahāngīrnāmah, Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī*, ed. by Muhammad Hashim (Tehran: Bunyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1980), p. 215.

40 'Abd al-Sattar Lahori, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, ed. by Arif Naushahi and Muin Nizami (Tehran: Miras-i Maktub, 2006), pp. 258-60.

41 See Losensky (1993) for a study of the vogue of this poetry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Persianate world.

42 Lahori (2006), p. 256.

same way that *tazkiras* did in writing. Additionally, it was not just the poets but also patrons who wanted to hone their aesthetic tastes and keep up with the latest trends and popular verses in the larger Persianate culture (see also Schofield and Busch in this volume).

Another author from the late Jahangir period has left a similar text to the one by Lahori. Mutribi Samarqandi in his *khatima* (conclusion) to a larger biographical dictionary of poets called *Nuskha-yi zībā-yi Jahāngīrī* (1625) kept a record of meetings with Jahangir. In this work Mutribi attests to the emperor's continuing interest in discussions about poetry centred around performances. During their fifteenth session, the Emperor Jahangir asked the seventy-year-old Mutribi to sing, which the latter did reluctantly, and then a theoretical discussion on music ensued. In their seventeenth meeting the Emperor Jahangir told Mutribi, "The sweet-voiced nightingale [Fasih Khan] has been reading your book to us for hours. We enjoy it very much".⁴³ At the twenty-third meeting, the emperor informed Mutribi that Fasih Khan had finished reading his anthology and ordered the book to be placed in the royal library. He also suggested to Mutribi that his own anthology, compiled when he was a prince, could be incorporated into the larger work, to which the author acquiesced.⁴⁴ Written texts, thus, resulted in these types of oral discussions and recitations that in turn sometimes led to amplifications of the original texts.

Performance and Memory

Instances of memorable musical and poetic performances are frequently described in sufi sources, testifying to the portentous effect music and poetry could have on one with a sensitive nature. Interestingly, Mughal courtly sources also carry resonances of this perception. In his memoirs Jahangir narrates a strange occurrence (*amr-i 'ajīb va qaz̄īya-yi gharīb*) during a performance by *qawwals* on 12 Muharram of the fifth regnal year (8 April 1610). As part of the performance, the singer Sayyid Shah enacted a simulated *sama'* (*bi-ravish-i taqlīd samā' mīnamūd*). Jahangir records that he was curious about the context of the line of Amir Khusrau that was being sung that evening and asked if anyone present could explain it:

43 Mutribi Samarqandi, *Khāṭirāt-i Muṭribī*, ed. by 'Abd al-Ghani Mirzayif (Karachi: Mu'assasah-i Tahqiqat-i Asiya-yi Miyanah va Gharbi, Danishgah, 1977), p. 70.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

har qaum rā-st rāhī dīnī u qibla-gāhī
mā qibla rāst kardīm bar simt-i kaj-kulāhī

Every community has its right way, creed and prayer;
 I turn to pray towards him with his cap awry.⁴⁵

From the audience, Mulla 'Ali the seal engraver came forward and explained that during his father's time he had heard the story that provided the background to the composition of these lines. Apparently, one day Nizamuddin Auliya (d.1325), Khusrau's spiritual master, was watching some Hindus perform their religious rituals and uttered the first line. Just then Amir Khusrau joined him and replied with the second hemistich as a compliment to his spiritual master. Jahangir writes that as soon as Mulla 'Ali recited the second hemistich, he became so affected that he fell down before the throne. Concerned, the emperor himself got up from the throne and the royal physicians rushed to Mulla 'Ali's side thinking he was having an epileptic fit, but there was nothing to be done because he was dead. He was taken away to be buried. This remarkable occurrence encapsulates several layers of parallel performative contexts taking place around this one line of poetry that is actually found in a *ghazal* by Khusrau's contemporary Hasan Sijzi (d.1338)—the original interaction between poet and *pir* to explain the meaning of the verse, and the later Mughal reception of it. There is perhaps also a hint of a suggestion that a price had to be paid for enacting a mock *sama'* session, although it was the innocent and pure-hearted Mulla 'Ali who became a martyr for love in the retelling of the story.

The aforementioned author of the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, Lahori, provides another, and more detailed, eyewitness report of the same event in the seventy-sixth *majlis* that took place on 15 Muharram 1020 (11 April 1610). He writes that there was a *sama'* session at court and the *qawwals* of Delhi sang this line of Amir Khusrau. The poet Maulana 'Ali Ahmad "Khalifa" narrated the context of these lines to the emperor as he had heard it from his father—the same narrative given by Jahangir. Lahori also pinpoints the exact moment of the event, one hour after nightfall, and gives a brief biographical sketch of the respected Maulana, whose father was an accomplished dervish and who was himself appointed as tutor to the princes. In contrast to this esteemed figure, he mocks the fake dervish

45 Jahangir (1980), p. 97.

who was imitating the *sama'* (*yakī az darvīsh-šūratān ki khvud rā sayyid guft... bi-taqlīd samā' mīkard*). In the end, in order to emphasise the uniqueness of this event he only has recourse to the written word by declaring that nothing like this can be read in books of history (*kutub-i tārikh*). But this was not the end of the life of this memorable performance. Twenty years later the Mughal court retained a memory of this event. During his extended visit to the Mughal court, the aforementioned Mutribi, in one of his sessions with the emperor, was describing a certain Central Asian dervish youth who heard a schoolboy sing the poems of the antinomian poet Qasim Anvar (d.1433) and died on the spot. Upon hearing this, the courtier Maktub Khan told Mutribi about the unfortunate Ahmad 'Ali who had died after reciting Amir Khusrau's verse two decades earlier, and Mutribi affirmed that he had read this story in the *Jahāngīrnāma*. Mutribi added that he also saw a painting of this event, presumably in a manuscript of the text. This story has even more re-tellings,⁴⁶ but the intriguing question is why it lingered for so long in the memory of the Mughals. On one level, the three versions of this event in different Mughal works reiterate the point that the performance of Persian mystical poetry had the power to move people's hearts to an extreme degree, but the story itself was strange enough to be included in various texts as entertaining material. The strange context of the story, the biography of the reciter, and the use of Amir Khusrau's verses in *qawwalis* are defining aspects of Mughal oral culture that link the Timurid past to the present, the sacred to the profane, and the spoken word to the written.

The Mughal fascination with this story may be connected to a hagiographical tale in the history of the sufis of Delhi concerning Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (d.1235),⁴⁷ a story that also had a life in Mughal texts. The following account is taken from the *Mūnis al-arwāḥ*, a collection of biographies of Chishti sufis written in 1640 by princess Jahanara, daughter of the Emperor Shah Jahan, who along with her brother Dara Shikoh was mystically minded. She writes:

It is narrated that one day the *qawwals* were singing this line:

Those who are slain by the dagger of submission
Have another life at all times from the unseen.

46 Yet another version is found in *Ma'āṣir-i Jahāngīrī* by Khvaja Kamgar Husaini, ed. by Azra Alavi (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1978), p. 128.

47 I am grateful for Katherine Schofield for bringing this to my attention.

An ecstatic state overcame the Khvaja [Qutbuddin] and for three days the singers repeated these same lines. He was unconscious and at the time of prayers he regained consciousness, asked the singers to sing the same line and lost consciousness. This went on for four days. On the fourth night his condition changed and his auspicious head was next to Qazi Hamiduddin Nagori and feet next to Shaikh Badruddin Ghaznavi. When Qazi Hamiduddin saw this state of his he asked him [the Khvaja], "Who among the *khalifas* should sit on the prayer mat?" He said, "Give the robe, staff, bowl and sandals that I received from the guiding master [Mu'inuddin Chishti] to Shaikh Fariduddin Mas'ud Ajodhani". And then the bird of his soul flew to the highest heaven.⁴⁸

In another work of this period, *Siyar al-aqtāb* (1646), the sufi Shaikh Allah Diya recounts the same story, providing additional information in the names of the singers, Salahuddin and his sons Karimuddin and Nasiruddin. The parallel occurrence of the two anecdotes in Mughal texts of the same period shows that, as far as the performance of the *ghazal* is concerned, by the sixteenth century sufi and courtly practices overlapped to some degree. It is somewhat unclear whether the same singers performed *qawwali* at sufi shrines and at the Mughal court, although it would seem likely if the emperor or governor summoned the performers for a private performance. The increasing use of Hindavi/Hindi lyrics at court may have been an influence in the blending of boundaries between sacred and profane, courtly and non-courtly.

Multilinguality at the Mughal Court

We have seen that the place of origin of performers was an important identity marker for practitioners of the arts, much more so in the early Mughal period, when the notion of purity of language was hegemonic and the recitation of stories or chanting of poems were the exclusive domain of native speakers of Persian. Courtly Mughal Persian sources from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are uncannily silent about performances or recitations in languages other than Persian. This, of course, does not demonstrate that only Persian performances took place at court, as Allison Busch has convincingly shown with reference to Brajbhasha Hindi poetry, but rather that the authors who documented the lives and practices

48 *Mūnis al-arvāh*, in *Princess Jahān Ārā Begam, Her Life and Works*, ed. by Qamar Jahan Begam (Karachi: S.M. Hamid 'Ali, 1991), pp. 84-86.

were writing for a specific kind of audience which only prized Persian.⁴⁹ As we have seen, the prestige of Persian at this time facilitated the inclusion of the accounts of poets and storytellers in biographical dictionaries alongside more powerful individuals, but excluded others who were part of a multilingual oral culture, even if this overlapped or existed alongside with Persian. This same tendency can be found in the case of poetic *tazkiras* which only commemorate the achievements of poets writing in Persian, or occasionally Turkish or Arabic, but not in local languages.

In this context, the mention Emperor Jahangir makes in his autobiography in the year 1608 of being “taken with the verses for him by a Hindi poet (*charan*) in the entourage of the Rajput prince Raja Suraj Singh” and exclaiming, “I have rarely heard Hindi verses on such a delicate theme” is rather unusual.⁵⁰ In fact what is preserved in the text is a Persian version of these verses, not the original Hindi. Another exceptional instance from a few decades later concerns the brothers Mir Muhammad Salih and Mir Muhammad Mu‘min, both courtiers of Iranian descent whose father had been a master calligrapher under Akbar and received the title *mishkīn-qalam*. The elder brother was the *darogha* or overseer of Shah Jahan’s library and used the pen-name “Kashfi” in Persian and “Sujan” in Hindi. One of the brothers is said to have written a treatise on music, a fact that is not recorded by other sources who mention the brothers, such as Muhammad Bakhtavar Khan’s history of Aurangzeb, *Mirāt al-‘Ālam*, demonstrating that a single biographical account only provides an incomplete picture of the complexities of the cultural scene at the Mughal court. The historian of Shah Jahan’s time, Muhammad Salih Kanbo, writes about them in his work *‘Amal-i Ṣāliḥ*: “Since both are adept at Hindi songs (*naghma-yi hindī*), the singers (*naghma-sarāyān*) of India listen to their performances”, suggesting that they listen both for enjoyment and instruction.⁵¹ It is thus possible that rules about including Hindavi/vernacular song-music *within Persian texts* were beginning to loosen up by the mid-seventeenth century,⁵² although

49 Allison Busch, ‘Hidden in Plain View: Brajḥasha Poets at the Mughal Court’, *Modern Asian Studies* 44.2 (2010), 267-309, and her essay in this volume.

50 The first sentence is from Christopher Shackle, ‘Settings of Panegyric: The Secular Qasida in Mughal and British India’, in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, ed. by Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 213; the second is from Jahangir (1980), p. 80.

51 Muhammad Salih Kanbo, *‘Amal-i Ṣāliḥ*, ed. by Ghulam Yazdani and Wahid Quraishi (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1967-1972), pp. 344-45.

52 Kanbo’s reference to the Hindi poet Kavindra is further evidence of this: ‘Either the Mughal court’s sponsorship of Braj texts was on the rise in Shah Jahan’s period or

as early as Akbar's time, the poet Gada'i, son of the renowned sufi Shaikh Jamali and holding the post of *sadr al-sudur*, was mentioned as having a talent for composing and singing in Hindi.⁵³

The fascination with, and even anxiety about, the nature of the classical Persian canon, and with forging connections with the Central Asian and Iranian lands, thus underwent a transformation in the later Mughal period, most notably in the representation of what was never a monolingual culture in the first place but a multilingual one, even as the social, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds of the writers of biographical dictionaries and histories became more diverse. The importance of oral culture embedded in practices such as recitation and discussion about the merits of one poet over another should also be considered when studying the process of canon formation in Persian or Indo-Persian literature. What did remain unchanged was that in the courtly milieu, the oral setting, for poetry at least, was never completely eclipsed by book culture.

In the early textual sources, we have seen, the lives of performers were recorded only when they held other positions of honour. Otherwise they might just have found a passing mention in these works. Professional poets, in addition to their traditional duties as panegyrist and writers, also fulfilled the roles both of storytellers and reciters. The eighteenth-century panoramic text on Delhi, *Muraqqa'-yi Dihlī*, by contrast, paints a lively picture of the world at the fringes of and outside the royal court. It records the names of many singers, dancers, reciters, and *qawwals*, and the genres they performed, but provides us with almost no information about the social or geographic origins of the performers—nor does it provide textual examples of the lyrics being recited, sung, or performed.⁵⁴ The focus of this work appears to be rather on the physical qualities of the performers and a hyperbolic and highly metaphoric description of their contribution to the now socially diverse culture of entertainment. Although the *Muraqqa'-yi Dihlī* was written in Persian, it thus symbolically marks the decreased importance of Persian and a transformation of earlier Mughal literary practices. The popularisation of poetry and its recitation was no longer limited to an elite audience and had become the hallmark of cosmopolitan comportment for a larger part of the urban population.

something had shifted in the historiography that made it more acceptable for Persian writers to mention Hindi poets'; Busch (2010), 151.

53 Bada'uni (2000-2001), Vol. 3, p. 52.

54 The Persian text was edited and translated into Urdu by Nur al-Hasan Ansari (Delhi: Department of Urdu, University of Delhi, 1982).