The Dissertation Committee for Nathan Lee Marsh Tabor Certifies that this is the

approved version of the following dissertation:

A Market for Speech

Poetry Recitation in Late Mughal India, 1690-1810

Committee:

_____

Syed Akbar Hyder, Supervisor

_____

Kathryn Hansen

_____

Kamran Asdar Ali

_____

Gail Minault

_____

Katherine Butler Schofield

A Market for Speech

Poetry Recitation in Late Mughal India, 1690-1810

by

Nathan Lee Marsh Tabor, B.A.; M.Music.

Dissertation

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and it was good to have a buddy to bond with over Texas-things like BBQ and country music. Lord willing, there will be more of that that kind of carousing in Chicago.

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vi

A Market for Speech

Poetry Recitation in Late Mughal India, 1690-1810

Nathan Lee Marsh Tabor, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Syed Akbar Hyder

This project focuses on 18th-century Persian and Urdu language *mushāʿirah*s or

poetry gatherings patronized by Mughal India's urban elite and depicted in period

compendiums or *tazkirahs.* Besides preserving poetry, the compendiums chronicle the

social, aesthetic, and sensual aspects of 18th-century public and private gatherings

from a stance that prizes the delight of lyric verse. The 1740s in particular mark a

watershed decade for poetry exchange and criticism as they bridged several

generations of India-based poets who were advancing the *tāzah* or "fresh" goals of

contemporary Persian writing and who were also recasting Persophone civility

according to vernacular sensibilities in a social setting that was arguably the heart of

Safavid and Mughal literary production. This dissertation examines how poets,

listeners, and patrons enacted a material form of literary sociability that informed the circulation of people and verse over the 1700s. Analyzing this pre-colonial context allows for a more critical understanding of aesthetic and ethical drives in South Asian literary practices, providing a more grounded and critical understanding of lyricism as a cultural practice.

By foregrounding the socio-aesthetic implications of recitation as a discursive practice, the present study understands the mushaʿirah as a unique site of literary subjectivity. Hence, the disciplinary boundaries between history, literary criticism, and ethnography are blurred to show that lyricism was not abstracted in 1700s poets' gatherings. Instead, it formed a highly instantiated social script that allowed for the playfulness of Persian-based aesthetics to parallel the levity of Mughal-era sociability found in period salons or *majālis*. The Mughal literary sphere in the 1700s was governed by expectations of honesty, humor, exaggeration, enchantment, and originality, qualities that were not bounded by one language or textual medium. Historiographically, the compendiums from the 1700s attest to mushaʿirah verse being self-referential, intertextual, and multilingual whereby the conventions of Persian-based aesthetics had a charismatic social life.

Table of Contents

Prefatory Notes

Conventions

All years are reckoned to the Gregorian calendar unless otherwise noted. "AH" refers to the *hijrī* calendar used for the Islamic cycle.

Hindī, *Hindavī* or *Rekhtah* are 18th-century names for the Persianized vernacular that today we call Urdu. I refer to Urdu's older names only when appropriate to the context. I follow Arthur Dudney's example where *Hindī* in italics indexes the 1700s term for Urdu in order to differentiate from the word "Hindi" which refers to the related tongue spoken today in India.

Some literary and social terminology differs from the 19th-century vocabulary that informs much scholarship on Urdu today. The most obvious example is the term *majlis* or "gathering." Contemporary writers have largely used this term to specifically refer to Shiʿi assemblies for the recitation of *mirāsī* or lamentations written for the martyrdom of Husain ibn ʿAli (d. 626-680) (see Hyder 2006). In 18th-century literary compendiums, *majlis* refers to any social gathering for singing, recitation, or dancing; it does not necessarily reference Shiʿi gatherings.

Additionally, terms like *tarhī mushāʿirah* or *ghair-tarhī mushāʿirah* are 19th-century neologisms, as is the term *guldastah* (a printed collection of mushaʿirah recitations). *Ham-tarh* has a curious usage in 1700s tazkirahs. It references recitation but not parallel verses, as we understand its meaning today. Instead, it refers to people who became stylistically linked through imitative verse exchange. This is part of the tendency for tazkirah writers to cast sociability in terms of versification or *mauzūnīyat* which can refer to social standing, an ability to cast verse, and the verse itself. For more on this see Chapters Two and Three below.

Poets are listed with their given names followed by their pen names. For example, Mir Muhammad Taqi's pen name is Mir, as he was usually known. Sometimes poets' names are followed by their *nisbat* or lineage which can refer to a locality or an alliance to teacher. For example, from the name "Josh Malihabadi" we learn there was poet who wrote under the name *josh* was from the *qasbah* town of Malihabad in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

When analyzing lyrics, I capitalize the names of the ghazal's paradigmatic characters, the Lover and the Beloved. I do this simply to show the radical alterity in their relationship and that the labels encompass a much larger metaphorical framework which I try to make clear through individual explications. For further reading on Persophone forms of ghazal lyricism see Schimmel (1992) and Prichett (1994).

Transliteration

I have stubbornly included the original texts because I often miss them when reading others' monographs. For this reason, I have tried to use the least invasive method of transliteration as possible.

Vowel markings are only in italicized words. All vowels are recorded according to Indo-Persian pronunciation. For more on this, please see Chapter Three for Mir Taqi Mir's take on the Western Iranian accent.

For diacritics, I make a concession for only two letters below because they have no abecedary equivalent in English and may actually help a non-specialist with pronunciation:

| ء | ʾ | *hamza* |
| ع | ʿ | *ʿain* |

A good example that succinctly illustrates of my approach is the title of Siraj al-Din Arzu's tazkirah:

Majmaʿ al-Nafāʾis   مجمع النفائس

With this example, it should also be noted that I do not mark "sun letters." Arzu's work listed above would be read aloud as *Majmaʿ un-Nafāʾis* according to this Arabic convention in pronunciation.

For names, I have avoided adding vowel markings except in ambiguous scenarios in which case I note the pronunciation; e.g., ʿAbd al-Hakim Hakim (*ʿAbd al-Hakīm Hākim*). Since I mostly refer to poets by their pen names there is little need to continually mark ambiguous cases. In this case, the poet and diarist is usually recorded as Hakim Lahori.

A Chronology of Literary Works, Poets, and Events in Mughal India's Long 18th-Century

1666 Saʾib dies in Isfahan after leaving India around 1635. *Tazkirah-i Nasrābādī* by Tahir Nasrabadi completed.

1682 *Kalimāt al-Shuʿarā* by Sarkhush completed.

1690 Bedil arrives in Delhi.

1696 *Mirʾāt al-Khayāl* by Sher ʿAli Khan Lodi completed.

1697 Nasir ʿAli dies in Delhi.

1699 Hatim the "nursemaid to the poets" born.

1700 Wali visits Delhi.

1707 Wali dies in Ahmadabad. Mughal emperor Aurangzeb dies in Khuldabad.

1719 Arzu reaches Delhi a second time after the assassination of the emperor Farrukh Siyar. Muhammad Shah's reign begins.

1715 Sarkhush dies in Delhi.

1720 Bedil dies in Delhi and Wali's *dīwān* is said to arrive there.

1721 The *ʿurs* or death anniversary celebration begins at Bedil's grave.

1722 Faizabad becomes the regional capital of Awadh.

1728 Gulshan dies in the young Mir Dard's home in Delhi.

1734 Hazin arrives in Delhi.

1737 Peshwa Baji Rao I attacks Delhi.

1739 Mir Taqi Mir comes to Delhi along with Hakim Lahori and ʿUzlat who have a noticeable impact on the Persophone literary scene. Nadir Shah sacks Delhi.

1746 The poet Ummid and the singer Sadarang die in Delhi.

1748 Khushgu completes his *Safīnah.* Muhammad Shah's reign ends with his death. Hazin exiles himself to Benares.

1749 *Riyāz al-Shuʿarā* by Walih completed.

1750 *Tazkirah-i Husainī* by Husain Dost Sambhali completed.

1750/1 *Majmaʿ-al Nafāʾis* by Arzu completed.

1752   *Nikāt al-Shuʿarā* by Mir, *Gulshan-i Guftār* by Hamid Aurangabadi, and *Tahfat al-Shuʿara* by Afzal Beg Qaqshal completed.

1753   *Tazkirah-i Rekhtah Goʾiyān* by Fateh ʿAli Gardezi completed.

1754   Arzu leaves Delhi for Lucknow.

1755   *Makhzan-i Nikāt* by Qayam al-Din Qaʾim Chandpuri completed.

1756   Arzu dies in Lucknow. Walih and Khushgu die in Delhi.

1756/7 Ahmad Shah Durrani invades Delhi.

1762/3 *Khizanah-i ʿĀmirah* by Azad Bilgrami completed.

1766   Hazin dies in Benares.

1771   Sauda leaves Delhi for the east.

1772   Mus'hafi arrives in Delhi after not finding work in Lucknow.

1774   *Tazkirah-i Shuʿarā-i Hindī* by Mir Hasan completed.

1775   Asaf al-Daula shifts Awadh's capital from Faizabad to Lucknow.

1781   Hatim dies in Delhi.

1782   Mir leaves Delhi for Lucknow.

1784   *ʿIqd-i Suraiyā* by Mus'hafi contains the last mention of Bedil's actual grave.

1785   Mir Dard dies in Delhi.

1786   Azad Bilgrami dies in Aurangabad.

1794   *Tazkirah-i Hindī* by Mus'hafi completed.

1802   *Riyāz al-Fushā* by Mus'hafi and *Majmuʿah-i Naghz* by Qadrat Allah Qasim completed.

1804   *Safīnah-i Hindī* by Bhagwan Das Hindi completed.

1810   Mir Taqi Mir dies in Lucknow.

1813   Ghalib writes about missing Bedil's grave.

1824   Mus'hafi dies in Lucknow.

Introduction

<div dir="rtl">

ای ذکر تو گل فروش بازار سخن

رنگین ز تو برگ برگ گلزار سخن

اوصاف تو مجموعهٔ دیباچه‌ نطق

توصیف تو مشاطهٔ رخسار سخن

</div>

What a memory of you, oh rose seller in the market of speech
Each and every petal is delightfully colored because of you in the garden of speech.
Your particulars are announced in the prefatory notes;
Your description is the handmaid to the countenance of speech.

In 1950s India a novice poet showed up to recite his compositions in a poetry salon. This was a gathering in which all the famous and beloved poets of the day were in attendance. When his turn came, he started reading his verses and they were horrible, out of meter, and without polish. Hearing the verse, most of the other poets kept quiet for the sake of preserving the poetry gathering's etiquette, but the famous poet Josh Malihabadi happened to be there and could not hold his tongue. At each line the novice poet read, Josh erupted with shouts of gushing praise, urging the young man onward. The journalist and poet Gopinath Aman, who was also there, noticed Josh's explosions of clearly feigned admiration. He leaned over and said, "What the hell are you doing?!" Josh quickly shot back, "Apostasy."

As witnessed by this joke circulating in Indian tea stalls, the Urdu mushaʿirah (*mushāʿirah*) or poetry gathering has a high level of both humor and gravitas. For over

three hundred years, Urdu language poets have cultivated the mushaʿirah as a social institution devoted to the circulation of literature's linguistic and poetic delight. The mushaʿirah is an aspect of the Mughal literary sphere that fixes literary enjoyment among a group of peers and competitors for the mutual exchange of lyrical verse. As with the joke above, much of its history even from the beginning is anecdotal, in which events become a set where literary wit and humor are staged. As an associative literary concept, the mushaʿirah grounds poetry as a mode of sociability and interchange between poets. This is a concept built into the etymology of "mushaʿirah," a word not easily translatable into English.

The concept of the mushaʿirah is familiar in literary communities speaking Urdu, Persian, and Arabic languages. The word "mushaʿirah" (مشاعره) comes from the Arabic triliteral root شَعَرَ (shaʿara) which means to learn or understand intuitively; to realize; to perceive, sense, or feel; and to be conscious or aware (Wehr and Cowan 1976). This root is construed as a form three verbal noun (مُفاعِلة) or *masdar* giving the root an associative meaning, i.e. to do poetry with someone else, or as I define it, to compete via lyrical exchange. The term creates an expectation that people themselves serve as the vehicles for the transmission of verse by reading it aloud in some kind of social

2

setting for a community of listeners. In short, the social life of Persian and Urdu poetry

is linguistically bound to the concept of the mushaʿirah.

For Persian and Urdu speakers throughout the 18th and into the mid-19th

century, the mushaʿirah was a social fact. Mughal and Safavid societies assumed it was

the primary circulatory and communicative means through which to share and enjoy

poetry especially in cultures that valued recited literature more than scribed verse. The

first reference to the mushaʿirah given in the lexicographer Ali Akbar Dehkhuda's

expansive Persian dictionary tells us that a mushaʿirah is to do battle in metered

language to measure poets' abilities (2014). It should be noted that many of the Persian

dictionaries Dehkhuda relied upon to arrive at this definition were compiled in India

over the period examined for this project. For C.M. Naim, mushaʿirahs in the 18th

century "were arenas to show one's prowess as a poet, criticize the work of others,

make a name for oneself and thus attract the attention of some wealthy patron" (Naim

1999: 181). Paul Losensky, also citing Dehkhuda's definitions, finds that while

"mushaʿirah" linguistically means "to address poetry to a rival," it is a "generous

rivalry" that fuels a spirit of mutuality and debate through developing and imitating

poetic conventions (Losensky 1998). Likewise, Mana Kia's definition expounds on the

sociability of an embodied institution that exists between written and oral realms:

> The immediate circulation of written work as demonstration of mastery of this corpus took place largely in the context of social spaces, from large gatherings (pl. *mahāfil*) to individual visits with other poets. Oral poetic recitation and performative embodiment of learned refinement were integral to these social contexts and their importance to demonstrations of mastery, and thus the authority to dictate usage should not be underestimated. (Kia 2011: 203)

These scholars' definitions of the mushaʿirah show there is a linguistic basis to the

mushaʿirah's discursive and sociological structure, telling us something specific about

Indo-Persian literary practices: the mushaʿirah is a literary endeavor that involves a

community of participants functioning under an implicitly agreed upon set of norms

and conventions.

Yet, there is something missing from these rich definitions that might be

apparent to Urdu or Persian language speakers familiar with their literary histories or

to any Urdu speaker who has attended a mushaʿirah. In an institution that prizes

language's slipperiness and the play of its grammar, it is strange that scholars have not

given more attention to the humor and delight or simply the entertainment that comes

with reading verse aloud to a community of peers, in other words, one of the most

apparent aspect of its discourse. Such buttoned-up approaches to literary history erase

4

much of the delight the institution's practitioners held most dear in what Frances

Pritchett refers to as the "elegant encounter" (Pritchett 1994).

This dissertation aims to understand the literary and discursive implications of

the mushaʿirah's social norms and aesthetic values during a transitionary moment in

early modern India's Persian literary sphere during the 1700s at the end of the Mughal

phase. Even though its imperium was fragmenting, *Hindūstān* or Mughal India was still

the center of Persian literary production and criticism for a cosmopolis that stretched

from Istanbul across the Iranian plateau and central Asia, abutting China's western

borders. In the midst of this, Mughal India's Persianized vernacular, what we today call

Urdu, was fast becoming a literary lingua franca, voicing the aesthetic and social

concerns of the "modern" Persian literary style popular at the time. This was the *tāzah-*

goʾī or "fresh-speaking" literary movement intent on mining new meanings from

extant themes and symbols of classical writers like Hafiz, ʿAttar, Saʿdi, and Salman

Savaji. Under the modernists' aesthetic regime, the Beloved's teeth could be like

mandibles on a locust and the Lover's tombstone would be like grape agate, soaking up

his blood in the from the grave. This daring use of metaphor would fall out of style in

the early 19th century under the *bāz-gasht* or return movement in Persian literature

which sought to distance itself from Safavid and Mughal literature or most literatures from outside the borders of Qajar Iran. However, the Persian-educated literary elite deployed 18th-century Mughal India's vernacular, known today as Urdu, continued the "fresh-speaking" approach to lyricism.

Given the mushaʿirah's growing popularity and circulation in the present era, understanding its complicated social and literary history at this vernacular turn sharpens on how we examine the institution today as a popular aspect of the contemporary Indo-Persian literary sphere. In the early 20th century, the mushaʿirah was patronized by princely states and political parties while it was also becoming a platform to broadcast dissenting lines during colonial India's independence movement. After partition, the mushaʿirah was represented on screen in the "Muslim socials," a particular genre of films representing Muslim social life, and historical dramas, through which it became indexical for the Mughal past. In both India and Pakistan, industrialists with literary inclinations began patronizing the event (al-Ahasani 1987; Silver 1992). At the same time, the Indian state's invitation to the yearly nationalist gathering at Delhi's Red Fort credentialed poets on both sides of the border (Taunsvi 1991). During the 1965 tension over Kashmir, the mushaʿirah again became a stage from which to recite

nationalist verse as radio broadcasts helped circulate poetry that was helping to

"defend the nation" (Naim 2004a).

In the present age, mushaʿirah poets lambast politicians for corrupting the

Indian and Pakistani states, and listeners eagerly praise recitations that skewer divisive

communal ideologies. In India mushaʿirah poetry often voices Muslim minorities'

weariness of the Indian state's communal policies to the extent that the history of

Muslim electoral politics since 1976 can be charted in poetry. These verses mourn the

lives lost during Indira Gandhi's declaration of martial law, publicize the uneasiness

over perceived infringement on personal law during the Shah Bano case, and protest

the continual rounds of violence that erupted over the Babri mosque tensions.

Currently, thousands of YouTube clips show poets singing and reciting verses

which listeners circulate and capture on their cell phones. Much of this poetry bends

literary ambiguity to reflect minority populist sentiments. Notably the violent policies

of a War on Terror that is perceived as oppressively anti-Muslim have become a theme

in poetry written by both Indian and Pakistani poets. Yet even with this threat of

lyricism wielding a dissenting voice, Indian politicians still host rallies with poetry

readings to gain Muslim votes in Hindi- and Urdu-speaking minority communities. On

top of this, rumors still circulate that then-chief minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, organized a mushaʿirah to pander to his state's Muslim community after orchestrating pogroms against them in 2002. Also, mushaʿirahs in the months leading up his right-wing party's election victory in May of 2014 hosted a flurry of verses deriding his violent anti-minority policies.

Today's mushaʿirahs are a global phenomenon in which Pakistani and Indian expatriates stage events in Persian Gulf states for South Asian migrant workers. Mushaʿirahs are held in America and Europe among Urdu speakers and even a young Anglo-American poet I am familiar with has been seduced by the mushaʿirah's public stage, acting as a poet to great acclaim in Indian circles. Yet, the mushaʿirah's expansion beyond the original Persian-speaking elite has in no way diminished its presence in India's agricultural belt, often thought of as the Hindi/Urdu speaking heartland. In spite of the growing availability of television and the Internet, every week there is a mushaʿirah being organized in some small town or growing city in which madrasah students, middle-aged men, and occasionally women come to hear poets recite until the morning prayer.

With this contemporary and popular literary sphere in mind, I seek to analyze the mushaʿirah's unique form of sociability in an understudied period in India's history. Until recently, Mughal India's 18th century has been usually described as an age of decline, but renewed interest in the social and literary changes occurring in this epoch have begun to challenge this assumption (Sharma 2000; Tavakoli-Targhi 2001a; Sharma 2009b, a; Kinra 2011; Spooner and Hanaway 2012; Hanaway 2012; Sharma 2012; Syed 2012; Dudney 2013; Kovacs 2013; Kaicker 2014; Pellò 2014b). Members of the Persian literary community saw the Mughal state withering around them, but their mushaʿirahs and literary criticism seemed to blossom despite this as they documented the many invasions of the Mughal capital of Delhi and unending economic downturn that would prove permanent under colonialism (Lehmad 1970; Ahmad 1979; Petievich 1990; for early Persian context on urban decline c.f. Sharif 2010). Interestingly, many of the same concerns about literary ethics, presentation, originality, and delight that arose in the Persophone context of Urdu's early vernacular sphere still inform the mushaʿirah's distinctive sociability that contemporary listeners have long treasured.

Out of this milieu, I frame my study generationally between 1690 and 1810. The 1740s, the decade dividing this span, were inaugurated with the 1739 sack of Delhi and

ended with a glut of history writing by the city's Persian-speaking community while

the mushaʿirahs continued despite the region's political instability. Even months after

the 1739 attack, semi-elite members of the Mughal gentry were coming to Delhi and

joining others in gatherings in which they debated and exchanged verse. In effect, the

span comprises about four generations of poets who inherited the "modern"—for lack

of a better term—concerns of *tāzah-goʾī* or "fresh-speaking" Persian writers and shaped

the epoch in which Urdu's literary sphere was formed. The *tāzah-goʾī* aesthetic was

intent on pushing lyricism's boundaries in the search for new meanings in ancient

themes.[1] Yet, *tāzah-goʾī* poets were also interested in the lyrical possibilities of *Rekhtah,*

the Persianized vernacular that we today call Urdu, circulating these same "fresh

speaking" sensibilities.

In 1690, *tāzah-goʾī* poet and self-styled saint ʿAbd al-Qadir Bedil (1644-1720)

moved to Delhi and began hosting well attended and engaging poetry gatherings in his

home for a wide range of people including courtesans, common singers, Hindu holy

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[1] Sadly, revisionist history coming out of Iran and India has buried this period of Persian literary history.
The *bāz-gasht* movement demanded a return to the ancient style and the "moderns" lost out, with the
Iranian historian Muhammad Taqi Bahar confining it all to the Indian school or *sabk-i hindī* (Bahar 1942).
Some have argued that it was Urdu that carried *tāzah-goʾī* interests and literary sociability forward as the
rightful inheritor of Persian literary humanism. Additionally, recent work in English and Persian has
generated more interest in these early "modern" poets (Kinra 2007b; Kia 2011; Dudney 2013).

men, and the local literati. When he died and was buried in the same spot in which these historic gatherings were held, the mushaʿirah continued with poets reciting at his grave. At the other end of this dissertation's span, 1810 is the year the Urdu poet Mir Taqi Mir died in Lucknow after leaving Delhi when it had been sacked a second time in 1761. In his literary diary penned over the lively 1740s, Mir remembers Bedil as an Urdu poet, recording one of the poet-saint's famous Urdu ghazals that many of Delhi's literati knew well. Mir himself probably attended the graveside mushaʿirahs after moving to Delhi in 1739.

In 1810, Persian was still recited and would continue to appear in the mushaʿirah well into even the 20th century, though on much smaller scale in comparison to the preceding years. While Persian compositions could be heard alongside Urdu poems, the poetic language favored by the intellectual elite would become Urdu. Persian would remain a language of prose and bureaucracy throughout the 19th century and during the late 1700s poets wrote in both and at times easily intermixed them in macaronic or mixed language works, some of which were recited at Bedil's posthumous mushaʿirah as we shall see below. On this note, it is important to resist any sharp distinction between these literary spheres. Though poets debated the

use of the vernacular in the musha'irah space, the aesthetic and social interests between Persian and Urdu language poets show how intertwined the two social spaces actually were.

At the other end of our span, Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi (1751-1824) appears opposite the image of Bedil. He hosted musha'irahs first in Delhi and then in Lucknow where he was one of many important figures in the region's literary sphere which had become a twin cultural capital to Delhi. Mus'hafi's relationship to the past and his musha'irah circles' specificity differed in comparison to that of Bedil who had a vast estimation of himself as an ecumenical demi-prophet. Though Mus'hafi too aligned himself with his *tāzah-goʾī* ancestors, his literary concerns were narrowed by personal competition and the politics of literary patronage, something Bedil famously disavowed as he claimed never to write panegyrics for lords. Mus'hafi was attuned to the ways in which imitative paradigms could break down alliances in a competitive musha'irah, but could also cement relationships with his many students in the course of his extensive literary output. Between Bedil and Mus'hafi the social sphere of the musha'irah had changed not just linguistically and economically, but also generationally. By 1810, there were few who had even a memory of Delhi's literary community gathering at Bedil's

home and much less at his grave even though it was perhaps the most well-attended and widely-known public mushaʿirah during the mid-18th century. Ironically, Mus'hafi was the last one to report seeing Bedil's actual tombstone in the early 1780s, twenty years after the mushaʿirahs there had ceased.

In my examination of mushaʿirahs and their anecdotes over a 120-year period, I am most interested in showing how concerns about meaning, originality, and legitimacy were argued and discussed in both the Persian and Urdu language spheres. I am most interested in connecting the mushaʿirah's focus on the delight of playful language between both Persian and Urdu contexts. Significantly, the same gripes vexed both Persian and Urdu literary communities within years of each other when poets argued over issues like plagiarism and proper conduct in the mushaʿirah space. Influenced by the pioneering work of Sheldon Pollock on literary cultures, recent studies of 1700s Persophone literature has shown how period concerns about literary criticism, philology, and historical linguistics had an inclusive, multi-regional focus on language usage and local literary acceptability (Pollock 2003; Dudney 2013). This emergent epistemology implicitly frames poets' approaches to literary sociability as well. From this vantage, I examine the conflicted and heterogenous literary sphere of

1700s Persian and Urdu mushaʿirahs as grounding the oral predilections of Indo-Persian literary practices in a society of reciters and listeners. The ways in which Persian and Urdu poets depicted literary sociability within the mushaʿirah space shows us that lyrical ambiguity was a lived ethical and communicative framework that governed literary communities within a rapidly changing society.

From a sociological stance, it was the "new elite in Delhi, composed of newly successful trading communities, service gentry with their own high cultural aspirations, and former regional elites, all of whom were for various reasons increasingly relocating into the center" who participated in mushaʿirahs as listeners, patrons, or poets (Alam 2004: 181-2). As documented in period diaries and anthologies, one of theses influxes occurred directly after Nadir Shah's 1739 invasion, an event that would change the political and cultural landscape of Mughal Indian permanently (Blake 1987; Tucker 1998). In spite of this political unrest, the intellectual representatives of the urban newcomers, poets with a Persian education, continued their gatherings and were in turn memorialized in the pages of Indo-Persian *tazkirahs*, a diary-like genre of historical and literary memorialization comprising the vast majority of sources for the project at hand. (Hermansen and Lawrence 2000). What we see in a "literacy aware"

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setting like Delhi in the 1740s is that lyricism functioned as communicative and relational aspect of men's and, to a lesser degree, women's public lives which were shaped in Sufi hermitages, courtesans' quarters, shrines, festivals, and the various bazaars covering the city. For the literati with a highly relational conception of poetic creativity and ethics, there had to be a market for speech.

0.1 Historiography of Socio-Literary Institutions and Pre-Modernity

While unique to South Asia in the modern and contemporary eras, the mushaʿirah has cultural roots in pre-Islamic Arabia through panegyric recitational competitions at the ʿUkāz, a yearly bazaar. The ʿUkāz was one of three annual markets held somewhere between Taif and Mecca during the first to the twentieth of Dhu al-Qidah,[2] the ten days prior to the yearly month-long pilgrimage to Mecca. The market was often imagined as a utopia outside of any organized state in which the Arabian tribal elite would gather for trade, boasting tournaments, and gift giving (Crone 2004; Bonner 2011). Competitive poetry recitation was part of the usual entertainment among the many other attractions of ʿUkaz. The market's lore tells us that the best of

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[2] This is the eleventh month of the Islamic calendar.

the popularly judged panegyric or *qasīdah* reciters would have their compositions

written in gold leaf on muslin to be hung on the kaʿbah the following month (Dhu al-

Hijjah). The ʿUkaz along with many other tribal customs ended following the advent of

Islam, but seven of these supposedly "hung odes" (*muʿallqāt*) have remained treasured

examples of pre-Islamic Arabic *qasīdahs* (Sells 1989). In fact, the poet and tazkirah

writer Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi notes his awareness of the hanging odes when he

drafted the introduction to his diary of friends' and students' verse recited in his

gatherings.[3]

Various incarnations of public poetry recitation remained important in Arab

society. For example, the *naqāʾid* of Umayyad-era Arabia and the literary salons of

Baghdad during the Abbasid sultanate are relevant examples (Ali 2010; Jorgensen 2012).

Yet, the current incarnation of the Indo-Persian mushaʿirah as we know it today in

South Asia owes its origins more directly to Arabic recitational gatherings in the

Iranian plateau beginning around 1000 CE. Coincidently, this was during the time New

Persian as a literary language was beginning to receive more concentrated patronage

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[3] May there be innumerable praises upon the skilled forerunner of righteousness whose eloquent tongue broke the strange rhetoric markets of the Arabian poets and with total grace placed the grandeur of the seventh seal upon all seven of the hanging odes in the kaʿbah (Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi 1985b: 1).

from the eastern regional kingdoms separating from the Abbasid imperium. One of the earliest documented recitational competitions in the Persian cultural context was the Arabic language *mushāʿirāt* (plural of *mushāʿirah*) between Persians Badiʿ al-Zaman al-Hamdani (969-1007) and Abu Bakr al-Khwarizmi (c. 1000) in the town of Nishapur. While this work does not cover the mushaʿirah in medieval Arabic language circles, the anecdotal history of their encounter is intriguing.

ʿAbd al-Malik al-Thaʿalibi (961–1038) relates the story in his tazkirah *Yatīmat al-Dahr,* or *The Orphan of the Age.* Here he writers that while traveling around looking for patronage, Badiʿ al-Zaman came to Nishapur to pay his respects to the noted literary genius Abu Bakr al-Khwarizmi. Khwarizmi snubbed the young poet, claiming that he could best Badiʿ al-Zaman in a public mushaʿirah (ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Muḥammad Thaʿālibī 1984). Forced to display his poetic prowess, Badiʿ al-Zaman was said to have composed over 400 prosimetric compositions (*maqāmāt,* works combining verse and prose) that he recited in Nishapur's town square, winning the accolades of his listeners and vanquishing the older, arrogant poet (see al-Qāḍī 1993). Badiʿ al-Zaman eventually left Nishapur and found his way to Herat in the region of Khurasan where an Arabic-

inflected Persian vernacular had begun receiving literary patronage in the newly

established provincial kingdom under Mahmud of Ghazna (971-1030).

Although that is another story far from this project's reach, the mushaʿirah

episode in late 10th-century Nishapur is relevant to this dissertation for two reasons.

Foremost, the idea of a poetry competition based upon the judgment and debate of

rhetorical abilities is an aspect of mushaʿirah culture that continues into contemporary

times. Urdu, Persian, and Arabic language poets have vied for patronage and

appreciation from their audiences under varying contexts and conditions for centuries,

but the centrality of their endeavors focuses on presenting lyric poetry before an

audience also familiar with its tropes, aesthetics, and stylistic expectations. It would

appear even in the medieval era there was an idea of a literary public comprised of

listeners, patrons, and poets with varying literary abilities, intentions, and tastes all

enjoying, assessing, and circulating period and historical verse in their respective

milieus (see Ong 1984; Meisami 1987; Somerset and Watson 2003).

Secondly, Khwarizmi and Badiʿ al-Zaman's story is anecdotal and documented

by one of their contemporaries, the furrier and polymath from Nishapur named ʿAbd

al-Malik al-Thaʿalibi. Uniquely, al-Thaʿalibi aimed to capture a literary history of the

present, tracing his contemporaries' rhetorical abilities from within his fixed

perspective at his hometown of Nishapur. This anecdotal approach is a hallmark of

literary historiography in 18th-century India, a particularly rich epoch for anecdotal

storytelling across the early modern world (Greenblatt 1980; Subrahmanyam 1998;

Stefanovska 2009; Young 2009; Ullyot 2011).

Al-Thaʿalibi's localized, anecdotal perspective serving as a history of poetry

recitation is fundamental to the current examination. The 18th-century mushaʿirah's

historiography in contemporary sources hinges on tazkirah narrators' witty,

appropriate, and illustrative deployment of novel meetings and interchanges. The fact

that the tazkirah writers who will be informing the current discussion had different

intentions and goals for recording literary anecdotes and mushaʿirah interchanges,

necessitates a re-evaluation of critical historiographic methods on literary history in

general (Said 1983; Reddy 1992; Orsini 2012). Social historians and scholars of literature

have shied away from relying too much on literature itself to inform critical

assessments of the early modern era. The tazkirah has alternately been prized and

denigrated as a primary source since it generates parallel expectations of delight and

ambiguity from the point of view of a "memorative" paradigm with partial and idealized portrayals of its subjects (Sadiq 1964; Faruqi 2008b).

Additionally, modern conceptions of civilization and culture, even from a critical standpoint, do not necessarily account for the mushaʿirah, an institution which appears to approximate something like a node of civil society, but does not fit many of the scholarly agendas set by historians focused on the Mughal courts or questions of modernity, nor does it fit the interests of literary scholars interested solely in an Urdu canon. The mushaʿirah was populated by a community of reciters and listeners who would sometimes write things down, but as it was primarily oral, the scope of its circulation bled into the markets as people exchanged verse outside of the mushaʿirah setting. This communicative setting did not proffer a self-reflexive definition of politics or culture, or even itself. The mushaʿirah simply sought to represent verse. That is, the mushaʿirah was not an institution designed to propagate culture per se as it would in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; it was not indexical for Mughal literary culture, it simply existed as it was.

The present project aims to understand the social history of the late-Mughal public sphere through examining the mushaʿirah as a material language practice. Not

only were there financial outcomes for poets in search of patronage, what Robert McChensey calls the "Persian literary economy" (1996), but the Persian-based lyrical conventions became incarnate through beautiful voices, drugs, and attractive participants in the mushaʿirah space. Lastly, the poets themselves used the image of a market of speech or at times a battlefield of verse to debate the public form of mushaʿirah-based literary sociability. With its publicness in mind, historians have long assumed that early modern literary gatherings helped to form something like a public sphere in pre-colonial India (Zaidi 1989; Bayly 1996: 194-5; Rahman 2008: 62-4). Even into the 19th century, historians have focused on the mushaʿirah's form of a literary public in Delhi (Zaidi 1989; Pernau 1993; Pritchett 2003; Pernau 2006).

With Frances Pritchett's work on Saʿdat Khan Nasir's tazkirah *Khush Maʿrikah-i Zebā* (ca. 1846) being a notable exception, we see little in these historical examinations that tell us how the mushaʿirah functioned as the literary public scholars avow it to be. That is, we do not see discussions of how literature formed social relationships as many claim that it did at a time when recited poetry was culturally prized. In fact, some even cast the mushaʿirah's origins with Sufi reformers in the mid-1700s, claiming one Sufi in particular resurrected the institution (Schimmel 1975a: 171; Zaidi 1989: 75; Malik 2003:

240). On the other hand, there has been no shortage of creative and historical

engagements with Farhat Allah Beg's novella *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shamaᶜ.* This work tells the

story of an imaginary poetry gathering which took place during the 19th century, a

period some consider to be Urdu literature's golden age. Curiously, this fictionalized

account has often been cited as an historical representation of the vernacular literary

sphere (Qamber 1979; Dalrymple 2006).[4]

"Call me Karim al-Din," begins the infectious novella in which Beg describes a

fantastical mushaᶜirah set in 1845 and organized by the mid-19th-century tazkirah

writer and secretary Maulvi Karim al-Din of Panipat (1821-1879) who narrates and

organizes the whole undertaking. Beg's narrative and story-telling abilities conjure up

the voices of mid-19th-century Delhi's Urdu poets as they gathered together for what

Beg saw as Mughal literary culture's dying flame that would be snuffed out in the

onslaught of colonial modernity and cultural reform. Historians since have followed

Beg's dramatic intention by also framing this imagined mushaᶜirah as a synecdoche for

the end of Mughal culture as a whole (Malik 2003; Pernau 2003: 114; Dalrymple 2006:

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[4] For annother engaging work of historical fiction that paints an intriguing portrait of the "imaginary mushaᶜirah" see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's *Kaʾī Chānd The Sar-i Āsmān* (2006). The present work regrettably does not have the scope to adequately engage it.

105-6). In the 1991 edition of *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shamaᶜ*, editor Rashid Hasan Khan stresses

that the events and scenes of the mushaᶜirah are not a creation of Beg's imagination,

but rather a representation of "living reality" (Hasan Khan 1992: 22). This tendency to

conflate the "real" with the "historically true" is also seen in Beg's methodology, which

he outlines in his introduction and in scattered footnotes throughout his work. To

construct his imaginary mushaᶜirah, Beg interviewed people who were alive during the

time the event was to have happened, corroborating events and selectively omitting

contradictory accounts.

Beg wrote an undoubtedly seductive piece of Urdu prose that dramatically

weaves together poetic and historical elements, but I would rather have heard more of

those contradictory accounts. It would be intriguing to see Beg's notes from his

interviews as they must have had wonderful anecdotes. Instead of looking for those

likely lost scribbles, the tazkirah Beg relied upon to inspire his imaginary mushaᶜirah

provides an engaging background to *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shamaᶜ's* goals. *Tabqāt al-Shuᶜarā-i Hind*

contains an account of the actual Karim al-Din's attempt at hosting a mushaᶜirah. We

learn that in spite of his faithless business partners seizing the profits of the printing

house where he held his gathering, Karim al-Din kept the soirees going since he was

still in possession of the lithograph apparatus and the printing house itself. For a time

in 1845, he released a monthly, two-page pamphlet with the poets' compositions and

particulars. This was called a *guldastah* in 19th-century terminology.[5] Yet, Karim al-Din's

ultimate goal was to use this material to prepare a "tazkirah of India" for the sake of

"bygone days" (Karim al-Din 1983: 410). Unfortunately, the "ignorant" business

partners stopped even this and the tazkirah never materialized (Karim al-Din 1983: 149;

Powell 2006).

Though Karim al-Din does enter some of his friends' particulars into his

compendium *Tabqāt al-Shuʿarā-i Hind,* this book was not a product of his mushaʿirah

patronage over those two months in 1845. The *Tabqāt,* also called *Tārīkh-i Shuʿarā-i*

Urdū / A History of Urdu Poets (c. 1848), was Karim al-Din and F. Fallon's joint translation

of the French Orientalist Garcin de Tassy's *Histoire de la littérature hindouie et hindoustanie*

(1968). On the mushaʿirah front, Karim al-Din was in part trying to capitalize off of a

growing print market and wide demand for new Urdu verse. As it turns out, however,

Karim al-Din did not even like poetry, or at least he disavowed at one point, stating,

"Love of writing Urdu poetry is not for me at all, rather, I hold [composing] poetry to be

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[5] This term literally means "bouquet" but is actually a kind of poet's playbook (Pritchett 1994). See the
last section of Chapter Two below for this textual genres' precursor.

bad, because it's not the business of men of learning. Those people who are free from having to earn their living have taken this means of amusing themselves and obtaining vicarious pleasure" (Karim al-Din 1983; trans Powell 2006: 210). Of course, Lahore in the late 19th century was a center for the critique of lyricism as Muhammad Husain Azad and Altaf Husain Hali's reform-minded thematic mushaʿirahs were beginning under British guidance (Altaf Husain Hali 1997; Shackle 1997). It would have been hard to cast an imaginary mushaʿirah with a patron who thought poetry was a cheap pastime, hence this wrinkle was perhaps rightly ironed out of Beg's narrative.

The 1845 imaginary mushaʿirah enables a fictive version of Karim al-Din to make his hope for his own period tazkirah a reality. Beg's novella is the tazkirah that never happened. It is understandable that contemporary literary historians trying to describe the crisis of 19th-century Muslim culture and public culture in particular would turn to Beg's work. The *Ākhrī Shamaʿ* is seductive for its idealized version of Delhi's 19th-century literary public as a cultural artifact. In this regard, contemporary historians have overlapping goals with both the actual Karim al-Din and Farhat Allah Beg in a desire to capture the cultural as opposed to communicative logic of the mushaʿirah as a literary public.

The representational lacuna of the early mushaʿirah comes from a tendency to transpose the cultural intent of works like Beg's onto the historical public sphere which did not function according to the dramatic depiction he was attempting to relate in the *Ākhrī Shamaʿ*. That is, his work is understood to be imaginary but true in a paradigmatic sense for capturing the Mughal literary sphere as a cultural entity. However, it is a mistake to read so much of culture, civilization, or even identity into a representational but restrictive communicative realm that had no intent to depict "culture" according to the self-reflexive 19th-century definition that informs scholarship today. In turn, some historians have uncritically reproduced Beg's idealized version of literary sociability in a realm that does not seek to self-consciously represent culture per se. As we shall see, the mushaʿirah as a socio-literary institution seeks to represent artistic language within a community of peers through very particular and specific modes and genres of literary circulation. On the topic of Beg's cultural project, a more interesting analysis would have been to examine how Beg selected and assembled the verses that frame his imagined discursive sphere which would reveal something about the preservationist intentions of North Indian cultural critics in the 1920s.

However, reading literary texts as discursive historical artifacts poses a

methodological problem for historiographic examination because of the conflicting

intentions and idealized modes of representation the texts themselves circulate

(Bakhtin 1986; Wong 2006; Silverstein 2014). Certain comparative approaches to

literature have begun focusing on "how texts come to matter" as aesthetic experiences

that constitute socio-literary subjectivity (see Allan 2012). Lyricism itself has only

recently been seen as something capable of social critique in recent studies by Amir

Mufti, but his focus is only applicable to the 20th century (Mufti 1995, 2004). With the

notable exception of Ayesha Jalal's *Self and Sovereignty*, previous social histories and

literary examinations have avoided engaging lyricism as an actual discourse and

instead accepted the cultural and social intervention Beg was making as an idealized

but accurate account of the mid-19th-century literary sphere's mushaʿirahs.[6] In many

ways, previous sketches historians have made of the mushaʿirah were attempting to

portray a literary sphere which hinged upon communication without looking at the

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[6] Jalal's point about Muslim subjectivity in prose and poetry is crucial for understanding literary
sociability in the Subcontinent in any context:

> The subjectivity of the Muslim as individual finds ample voice in poetry and prose, whatever the
> spatial or temporal nature of the historical context. It is a subjectivity which borrows heavily
> from Islamic idioms, but one whose expression is interspersed with a welter of other
> demarcators of identity such as territory and language. (Jalal 2000: 9)

content of what the poets were actually saying, favoring a wide cultural portrayal as opposed to digging for the messiness and contradiction of embodied communicative and lyrical acts.

While some might argue against reading lyric poetry and literary anecdotes from a discursive stance, the very idea of a public sphere is undergirded by literary intent. Writing during in the post-World War II years of West Germany's "economic miracle," Jürgen Habermas formulated his much debated but useful concept of the public sphere as a realm of rational debate and exchange of ideas which grew out of 18th-century Britain's coffeehouses and early print capital (see Cowan 2004). In an often cited passage on the literary origins of rational discursive space, Habermas casts the middle-class' discussion of literature as an apolitical and undercover "precursor of the public sphere operative in the political domain" (Habermas 1991: 9). Without getting into the many debates on the term's applicability, the notion of a public-like literary context remains a useful concept for the present study as, I pay critical attention to the term's limitations for 1700s India Mughal India. Farhat Hasan asks a pertinent question in this regard: "Can we [...] use Habermas' insights on the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere for a better understanding of the relationship

between culture and power, and the processes of intersubjective communication and identity formation in medieval India? Can we also refer to the existence of a civil society in that period" (2005: 87)?

Hasan's uneasiness in applying Habermas' term to the early modern era is understandable given the concept's European focus, short-lived existence, and provincializing tendency (Fraser 1992; Chakrabarty 2000; Calhoun 2010). As Hasan and others have shown, however, there was civil society-like institutions and a conception of publicness based upon socially formed opinions in pre-colonial India that do not have to conform to European teleologies on civilization or modernities that might have been (Hefner 1998a, b; Eisenstadt 2000). So too in the mushaʿirah's literary sphere, taste was formed and debated, ideas were exchanged, and listeners could expect to be entertained. As an institution whose foremost aim is communicating literary knowledge, its abilities are highly discursive. Namely, its verse was a communicative "amalgam that [partook] of imperfectly articulated collectives" (Loewenstein and Stevens 2004). Historian C.A. Bayly describes these collectives in the brotherhoods, religious orders, and literati of precolonial India's "literacy aware" context which formed what he calls an "Indian ecumene," a term he uses both to mirror and

differentiate from the communicative space that Habermas' teleology proffers (Bayly 1996).

Sheldon Pollock elucidates the idea of a pre-colonial literary sphere in the context of his idea of the Sanskrit cosmopolis which propagates "a universalism that never objectified, let alone enforced, its universalism" (Pollock 2006:12). In other words, the pre-colonial Indian ecumene was a complicated literary sphere where taste, aesthetics, and literary knowledge circulated in gatherings in courts and homes and among the commoners in the bazaar but did not advertise a unified set of textual, religious, or social practices (John Richards 1997; Subrahmanyam 1997, 2001; Cummings 2003; Behl 2011; Tavakoli-Targhi 2011; O'Hanlon 2013a, b). Although largely dominated by male, elite classes, the Mughal public also included courtesans, unlettered singers, coffee servers, and market lotharios initiated into Persophone literary conventions participated in poets' gatherings at least peripherally and sometimes centrally.[7] It should be noted that elite women appeared to participate in the semi-public context of the mushaʿirah, but through "correspondence mushaʿirahs" according to anecdotes from the 1680s discussed below (see Chapter One).

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[7] For an interesting discussion on the way women are represented publicly see Vanita (2012) and for the European context see Cohen (2008, 2012).

In effect, Mughal publics are by and large undefined at this point, but they show the possibility for examination through an engaged and careful "analysis of Indo-Persian's discursive boundaries on etiquette literature, and ethics"—aspects in which members of the mushaʿirah setting were heavily invested (Kinra 2008: 208-11). In an inspiring and encouraging three-page footnote to his dissertation, Rajeev Kinra raises a compelling example of an Indo-Persian conception of this milieu in the idea of *khalq* (ibid.)*.* While literally meaning "creation" it often connotes a sense of publicness as cited in poetry or in tazkirah anecdotes. As discussed below, we see one writer describing the people coming out for the mushaʿirah festivities at the 18th-century poet ʿAbd al-Qadir Bedil's grave as the *khalāʾiq* (pl. of *khalq*) or "the masses." In this particular popularly mid-1700s yearly event, the mushaʿirah as a semi-public space prefaces the idea of a public to consume and circulate its literary knowledge through a society of listeners and reciters. In the course of this dissertation, the concept of a Mughal public will be explored in the literary and linguistic realm of Persian and Urdu language salons throughout the 18th century.

On this note, scholarship has begun to reframe the elite social divisions between Persian and Urdu languages usually projected on to this time period when at both the

linguistic and cultural levels the two were intertwined in the mushaʿirah context. The Persian = elite, Urdu = popular theorem has been a common aspect of the "declinist" teleology about this era consigning Urdu as a remedy to Indians' bad Persian (see Dudney 2013: iii-iv, 219). In contrast to previous centuries, the "long 18th century" marks a period when commoners' influence over the literary sphere was growing as merchants and even the laboring classes were casting themselves as literati and being represented in this period's tazkirahs penned by the urban semi-elite. Though even fewer, there are occasional anecdotes in which lower-class poets read their poetry aloud at mushaʿirahs.

Both the literal and metaphorical bazaar are important to ground our understanding of literary publics in which memorized poetry was prized over written documentation (Robinson 1993; Green 2009, 2010). As detailed particularly Chapter Five below, The relatively new availability of cheap consumable products like hashish, tobacco and, though to a lesser degree, coffee aided poets' rapport in the exchange of verse (Hakala 2011). The few coffeehouses which sprang up in Delhi's markets in the 1700s were carried over from Safavid lands and were often sites for poetry recitation. Wine was another substance linked with literary ability but its prices were often too

high for the average consumer. More often than not, the bazaar itself became a

mushaʿirah setting for loud verse singing and arguments (Shah Mahmud 1999: 74).

Writing in the late 19th century on his teacher's literary lineage from mid-1700s

Delhi, Shad Azimabadi portrays Faryad's interpretation of the early modern public's

interaction with the mushaʿirah:

> The beauty of it was that in a mushaʿirah the one who had a piquant verse
> would become famous throughout the city. Wherever you would look that very
> poem would be on the tip of the tongue and for nights would be continually
> sung in the bazaars. After a mushaʿirah until the next event would happen,
> wherever you would look, from the elite (*khāss*) to the commoners (*ʿavām*), the
> poetry gathering was being "reviewed." (Sayyid ʿAli Muhammad Shad Azimabadi
> 1927: 165-6)

The image that Shad paints is one in which the public circulates literature in the

market and public square, orally bartering and exchanging their critiques—Shad

actually uses the English word "review" to describe this process. Indeed, his illustration

of a verse sung in the bazaar to be reviewed by commoners and elite alike is not

something to be taken lightly given the Indo-Persian conception of oral literature as

something "specially chosen and universally understood" (*khāss-pasand wa ʿāmm-fahm*),

a saying Kinra also alludes to in his discussion on Indo-Persian boundaries of publicness (Kinra 2008: 210).[8]

These images inform our understanding of popularly circulated verse and illustrate the ability of recitational spaces to broadcast information beyond a given moment of utterance. This may suggest something about the discursive nature of lyrical verse. In fact, poets often used the idea of the literary market (*bāzār-i sukhan*) to refer to the competitive and material nature of the 1700s literary sphere. For instance, the madrasah of Ghazi al-Din Khan has been the site for mushaʿirahs since the late 1600s when Bedil would hold court there and others followed him "keeping the shop of literature hopping" (*dukān-i sukhan rā garm*) (Muhammad Afzal Sarkhush 2010: 50). As a setting marked for the exchange of verse, mushaʿirah sociability and anecdotes as depicted in tazkirahs place high social value on honesty, humor, exaggeration, delight, and originality as poets trafficked in poetry that grew popular for its linguistic

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[8] Naiyer Masud in his work *Marsīyah Khwānī kā Fan* or *The Art of Marsiyah Singing* further elucidates the role of the voice in literary production. He provides a quote from Syed Afzal Husayn Rizvi Sabit's work *Chirāgh-i Majālis* about the poet Mirza Khani Nawazish: "Whichever of the amir's ghazals Nawazish recited in a mushaʿirah with a special glance or gesture, the verses would keep circulating on [peoples'] tongues (*us ke ashaʿār zabānoñ par jārī ho jāyā kartā thā*). For a time, people would recite the poem and praise it" (Masʿud 1989: 2).

playfulness.[9] Given the complex social interaction between the written and oral realms,

patrons and poets, listeners and singers, the idea of a market of speech in the 1700s

Persophone public sphere is a productive image. Each of these spaces, the bazaar and

the mushaʿirah, rely on a material, sensory medium for the circulation of goods and

information.[10]

Yet, the historical mushaʿirah has remained strangely elusive for literary

historians attempting to understand its orally inscribed literary values. As the

aforementioned definitions have shown, stayed understandings of the institution,

which itself navigates the intricacy of language, avoid the nuance, subtly, and

contradiction of exchanging lyrics as a discursive action. In part, literary historians

have not concentrated on the social aspects of literature such as ethnographically

informed understandings of text practices or how literary practice reinforces notions of

publicness. For example, in an otherwise compelling work, Arthur Dudney's belabors a

point about the mushaʿirah as an unknowable social institution stating, "we do not

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[9] Rajeev Kinra has an intriguingly entitled conference paper cited in his dissertation entitled "Bazar, Mushaʿirah, and Tazkirah: Traces of Persophone Public Opinion in Mughal India." I can only imagine how his contribution would help me theorize these issues discussed here (2007a).

[10] For a contrasting view of the economic connections between markets and language see Bourdieu (1977, 1984); and LaDousa (2005).

know the sociolinguistic specifics of the pre-colonial *mushāᶜirah*" (Dudney 2013: 263).

This is a disheartening pronouncement since the mushaᶜirah's sociolinguistic output

fills pages of tazkirah texts. He continues, "We have so little information about social

aspects of the intellectual lives of 18th-century Indians that we are groping for answers

like Borges' Averroes" (ibid.: 23-24). Here Dudney alludes to Jorge Luis Borges' depiction

of Averroes, the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushid (1126–1198), not being able to

theorize Aristotle's notions of tragedy and comedy because he had never actually seen

a Greek play. On a side note, the metaphor of a play or movie is an abiding one for

popular culture when imagining the mushaᶜirah.

It seems Dudney and others want some kind of Farhat Allah Beg or Karim al-Din

to cast a mushaᶜirah for them in the 18th century. Even Dargah Quli Khan's travelogue

which documents gatherings does not have enough detail for Dudney to "reconstruct" a

period mushaᶜirah (ibid.: footnote 24). I'm not sure what a "reconstructed" 18th-

century mushaᶜirah would be, though Farhat Allah Beg has plainly shown us what a

19th-century reconstruction looks like. It seems Dudney's attitude falls prey to the very

critique he and others have leveled at historians who employ *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shamaᶜ* to

illuminate Mughal public culture: when it comes to understanding the cultural and

linguistic basis for the mushaʿirah's form of sociability Dudney wants to take Averroes to the theatre.

Perhaps it is the fact that there are only two historical registers within the tazkirah tradition which has made writing about the historical mushaʿirah so difficult. Only anecdotes and verse educate readers about the mushaʿirah's socio-cultural value system. When read across the many tazkirahs written during the 18th century, one is able to put together a patchwork image of mushaʿirah culture during this time period based on disparate connections between anecdotes. The verse, on the other hand, requires a different approach. Extrapolating the mushaʿirah's value system and internal nuances from the verse is trickier but can be done.

As we know, some tazkirahs were distilled and edited texts of particular poets' diaries which recorded an extremely partial and prejudiced, but nuanced view of their literary communities and the loose historical trajectories of their literary inheritance. The diary had the writer's verse, his friends' compositions, and perhaps partial poems overheard in a bazaar, gathering, or coffeehouse. Even at this first level, the poet's diary or *bayāz* was designed with communication in mind and not with the specific intent of preserving culture, yet it documents something subtle about community and

37

enchantment. The *bayāz* reflects a collection of tastes and enchantments as given poets

wrote down verse that was literally dearest to their hearts in the diaries they clutched

under their arms moving between the bazaar, the coffeehouse, and the salon.[11] While

poets during this time period had cultivated steel-trap memorative abilities, they still

had a material and archival instinct to write down anecdotes and verse samples.[12] Many

tazkirahs owe their existence to a group of poets assembling regularly to exchange

verse and therefore reflect a recitational subtext based on the diaries being carried

around to record interchanges and their peers' recitations (e.g. the tazkirahs of

Mus'hafi, Khushgu, Hasan, Mir, Hakim, Shorish).[13] From this perspective one has to read

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[11] The Urdu poet Wali Muhammad Wali (1635-1707/8), also known as Wali Dakani, quoted this line from the Mughal poet ʿUrfi (d. 1592) in his own panegyric or *qasīdah.* It reflects this early modern cultural logic the precious nature of *bayāzī* verse as jotted down in a diary. The is will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

زمانه خوانده فلک بر بیاض دیده نوشت
که این قصیده بیاضی بود نه دیوانی

Reading for an eternity, the sky saw what was what written in the diary.
For this *qasīdah* was worth noting down in a diary, not a *dīwan.*

[12] One European writer notes period poets learned thousands of verses by heart (Binning 1857: I:314 cited in Green 2010: 245).

[13] In addition to the tazkirahs listed here Dargah Quli Khan's travelogue *Maraqqaʿ-i Dihlī* and Zuhur al-Din Hatim's *Divān-zādah* might also be included as works that portray recitations and the reciters' literary communities built in meter, rhyme, and theme.

poetry itself as constitutive of a given literary sphere's sociolinguistic composition (Guillén 1971).

To reconcile the anecdotal and the poetic registers in the tazkirah requires the historian to take both a critical literary stance on the institution's social description and a linguistic anthropological approach to the poetry. First, the tazkirah anecdote needs to be understood within the larger, heterogenous social realm of late-Mughal public culture. By reading mushaʿirah anecdotes as creating community both in the historical and literary realms, it is possible to reach a more nuanced understanding of how the aesthetic and the social realms of North Indian Muslim literary culture are inexorably intertwined, something akin to the political life of lyricism. From this position we see how certain poems and anecdotes are "defining aspects of Mughal oral culture" joining the dichotomies of the religious and profane, the spoken and written, and the past and present (Sharma 2009a: 20). These oral texts as represented in the mushaʿirah are part of a "web of tellings" that "surveyed the pre-textual and the con-textual spaces of these poetic circles in order to shape a live, localized, and influential narrative of the specific world of Persian poetical production and reception in late Mughal north India" (Pellò 2009: 22). In effect, mushaʿirah anecdotes and the

sociological information given must be read from a literary stance; that is they hold the terms, values and assumptions of their period in their own tellings.

Not surprisingly, the poetry itself constitutes the bulk of most literary tazkirahs. Methodologically, this leads to a second and related point. If these works are based on diaries carried around to events, one would believe that implicit traces of some of the 1700s gatherings would be layered in the edited compendiums for the recited verses were the very texts—if we can call them that—period writers debated, circulated, and enjoyed with fastidious attention to nuance and a generous proclivity for delight and humor. In effect, we have to understand on what terms the mushaʿirah was and continues to be a social institution that prizes speech play and verbal art and the way in which certain textual practices and genres reflect this proclivity (see Sherzer 2002). From this position, I read tazkirahs archeologically looking for parallel rhymed verses between coeval tazkirahs and within singular works themselves.[14] Since many mushaʿirahs were organized around a model verse (*misraʿ -i tarh*), verses with the same end rhyme and refrain (*qāfiyah wa radīf*), what historians since the 19th century have called *ham-zamīn* or *ham-tarh* verses—that is, verses having the same ground or having

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[14] Reading for parallel verses like this is a project in and of itself.

the same base—can reveal how linguistic structures shape a society of reciters and listeners. The structural elements confirm alliances between poets and reveal who was reciting together and developing themes in tandem.

Additionally, the tazkirah tradition gives us instances of verses that call attention to their own recitation, a species of verse Frances Pritchett elucidates in her encyclopedic and critical examination of the entire poetic corpus of Asad Allah Khan Ghalib (d. 1869) and of Mir Taqi Mir (d. 1810). These self-reflexive verses are intertextual at a social level in that they reference and re-reference the mushaʿirah space in addition to their own language and literary ambiguity. These verses are aesthetically abstruse at both a linguistic and poetic levels through a twisted polysemy that generates infinite and ambivalent linguistic delight through a feedback loop of internal meanings and concepts. Since this sounds very technical, I preview an example here that will come up again in the final chapter. This is a verse known to be recited as a mushaʿirah sometime in Delhi's 1730s by Bindraban Das Khushgu:

مگر ذوق سخن دانی بیاد او دهد نامم
تو ای قاصد به تقریبی بخوان مقطع ز خوشگویش

Although a knack for writing poems in his memory gives me my name,
You, oh messenger, must at least read your Khushgu's last line!

At first glance the verse is a simple double entendre or *īhām,* a literary device both prized and scorned in the 18th century (Sadiq 1964; Faruqi 2003; Chalisova 2004). The word "*khushgu,*" our poet's pen name or *takhallus* meaning "eloquence" or someone who speaks eloquently, is semantically ambiguous because it refers to both of these meanings, that is eloquent speaking and the poet himself. Yet the first line renders it more complicated still as the linguistic and poetic elements twist form and content. The Lover writing poems for the Beloved ends each ghazal with his pen name, thus it is only the thought of the unattainable Beloved that allows the Lover, the poem's speaker, to have a name at all. Were it not for the Beloved, what would be the point of writing? Knowing this, the second line complicates the chain of referents again, raising the line's delight through layers of ambiguity. Is the speaker referring to himself? But which Khushgu? Is it Khushgu the speaker in the mushaʿirah or is it Khushgu speaking in the poem? Since it is an ending line, we would expect to hear a *takhallus*, so the speaker is not in fact the reciter. Maybe the reciter is the *qāsid,* or the unreliable messenger who is supposed to deliver the letter or in this case a poem. But the *qāsid* never actually delivers the Lover's messages so how can this verse even be recited in the first place? In the mushaʿirah context, the poem's subject is so semantically slippery it gives the

impression of a recited poem that is never recited since its subject can never really be

its subject. The Lover, the traditional speaker of the lyric, appears to recite without

reciting. The listeners would have been left in a delightful wilderness of signifiers. It's

this type of language and poetic play that form the fundamental imitative and

ambiguous element to mushaʿirah literature but which also makes the mushaʿirah a

similarly subtle historical subject.

In short, I aim to understand the pre-colonial mushaʿirah and the public sphere

it engenders in the terms of its practitioners who were intimately connected with the

nuances of the mushaʿirah's literary sociability on a nearly embodied level. That is, I

read tazkirahs and their verse by examining them for the communicative intention of

their writers. On this note, some would argue that these anecdotal depictions are

purely paradigmatic representations of an idealized literary sphere and only meant to

instruct or entertain the tazkirah writers' audiences who more often than not, were

simply poets themselves. On the level of verse in which I examine formal poetic

structure, I would respond that my archeological reading is indeed factual for it

confirms which groups of poets were reading together and how communities of poets

dealt with theme and meaning in an almost realtime representation of mushaʿirah

verse. Thus, the literary structures confirm the social structures in a predictable sociolinguistic fashion.

As far as the anecdotes are concerned, this is where Farhat Allah Beg's project is actually quite helpful from a historiographic perspective. From a cultural standpoint, Beg's work tells us more about the social and political milieu of the early 20th century for a Muslim India confronting different but parallel questions on modernity, aesthetics, and sovereignty. Yet, Beg poses important historiographic questions by imagining literary utopias through a traceable and genealogical connection to the past.

Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shamaꞌ was first printed as a book in 1928 by Khwajah Hasan Nizami (1878-1955), a journalist, author, and poet who was part of the inherited custodianship of the shrine of Chishti saint, Nizam al-Din Auliya (1239-1325) (Khwajah Hasan Nizami Dihlavi 1928). Nizami was very interested in promoting Indo-Muslim culture to the point of acting as a kind of Angel of History being drawn into the future, but going back to "awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin 1969: 257). For instance, after he had translated Dargah Quli Khan's work *Muraqqaꞌ-i Dihlī,* a valuable if quixotic travelogue upon which I heavily rely as well, he set about trying to find the poet-saint ꞌAbd al-Qadir Bedil's forgotten tomb since Quli Khan describes it and

its musha'irah festivities with some detail in the work (see Chapter Five below). Nizami apparently did find it to his satisfaction and it now stands in the *Bāgh-i Bedil* near the *Pragatī Maidān* just across from Delhi's Old Fort. It should be noted, however, many disagree with Nizami's geography (Abdul Ghani 1960; Bazmi 1963; 'Abd al-Ghani 1968; Amanat 1980; Hadi 1982). Given his relish for creating new pasts, it appears overdetermined that someone sent Nizami a copy of Farht Allah Beg's imaginary musha'irah when it was first circulated through Lucknow's *al-Nazār* magazine in 1927. After reading it Nizami went to the editor of the English language paper, "Young Muslim," so he writes, and asked him to have it translated into English so "the light of *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shama'* could reach Europe and America!" (Salah al-Din 1986: 30). The translation never appeared, but Nizami did release the *Ākhrī Shama'* as the book we know today.

Hasan Nizami and Farhat Allah Beg (1884-1947) were a generation removed from the flock of poets depicted in the *Ākhrī Shama'.* Unlike his teacher, Nazir Ahmad (1830-1912), who seemed to have an ambivalent relationship to the earlier generation, Beg embraced the musha'irah institution as embodying an idealized notion of pre-1857 high culture and seemed to be more comfortable with lyricism in general whereas Nazir

45

Ahmad was actively trying to disavow it as many others were during these years. An example of Farhat Allah embracing the old literary sphere is in his depiction of the *Rekhtī* or female-voiced poet named ʿAli Beg Naznin who even wore a woman's head covering in the mushaʿirah. Such a depiction would be unheard of in Nazir Ahmad and his generation's work. An example of Nazir Ahmad's relationship to the past can be seen in what C.M. Naim calls the most horrific scene in Urdu literature in which a character in an auto-da-fé burns hundreds of Persian and Urdu books (Nazir Ahmad 2003: 60-61).

Importantly, Beg himself openly states he was inspired by the imaginary gathering at the end of Muhammad Husain Azad's *Nairang-i Khayāl* in which Azad portrays a fantastical salon of literary masters from across a one thousand year period of Urdu and Persian literary history (Muhammad Husain Azad 1962: I:102). In 1927 when *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shamaʿ* was first published, modern Urdu literary history was still in its nascent phase. *Āb-i Hayāt* (1880) was only fifty years old by then and its presence was incredibly dominant in the literary imagination of time. In many ways, it still is to this day. In addition to the gathering in *Nairang-i Khayāl,* Husain Azad himself employed the imaginary mushaʿirah as a narrative device in his tazkirah *Āb-i Hayāt*, framing each

epoch as a gathering of liked-minded poets who debated and circulated the verse in style at the time.[15] Also, at the end of a later edition of the *Nairang* a writer casts the late Husain Azad himself into an imaginary gathering (ibid.: II:78-112).

Strangely, this particular narrative approach to literary history as an imaginary mushaʿirah was something regularly used by tazkirah writers throughout the 18th century and as far back as the beginning of the 1600s as well. Azad's essay on the imaginary mushaʿirah in *Nairang-i Khayāl* is most comparable to the introduction of Shah Nawaz Khan Aurangabadi's *Bahāristān-i Sukhan* (c.1747-1778) in which after discussing the social importance of poets and metered speech, Shah Nawaz gathers Persian and Arabic poets together to debate the same issues in a mushaʿirah (2009: 9). Similarly, Ahmad Ali Khan Hasmi of Sandila (1749-1809) narrates a meeting between poets from Iraq, Khurasan, and Fars (Persia) at which he sits quietly in the corner recording their verse (1970: I:8). Munir Lahori, whom we will also discuss in more detail below, cast a similar narrative in his *Kār Nāmah* (c. 1640), sitting in the corner listening to his fellow "fresh speaking" poets denigrate the masters from the past he holds so

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[15] Since the late 19th century's tazkirahs do not fit the scope of this dissertation I am not discussing them here in detail, but their looming presence is felt. A more in depth discussion on imaginary mushaʿirahs including Husain Azad's intervention will have to be done at a later date.

dear. Sher Ali Khan Lodi in *Mirʾat al-Khayal* has two imaginary gatherings that will also be discussed in the first chapter below.

When Beg's *Ākhrī Shamaʿ* is read with this longer tazkirah trajectory in mind, the historiographic element of his work takes on a new relevance, not from an uncritical cultural stance, but as a communicative example of Indo-Muslim memorative discourse. Hence, I advocate reading the *Ākhrī Shamaʿ* and earlier fantastical depictions of the mushaʿirah part of a chain of "memorative communication" that indexes a particular historiographic method to "reflect the divine favor conferred on worthy Indo-Muslim emissaries [—] in this case saints and poets" (Hermansen and Lawrence 2000: 150). The *Ākhrī Shamaʿ* does not represent a paradigmatic literary sphere per se but it does embodies an Indo-Persian mode of writing about the literary sphere.

Starting from here, it is possible to see how 18th-century mushaʿirah anecdotes and verse are capable of presenting an historically rich depiction of the pre-colonial public sphere in the communicative terms its writers held dear, that is in the "memorative" way they chart an early modern public sphere through delightful verse and entertaining asides. This particular mode of historiography is fittingly lyric in and of itself. It is more ambiguous and does not proffer a master narrative, but instead a

chain of possible referents. In this regard, we do not have to dismiss mushaʿirah

anecdotes as purely entertaining or instructional, but instead we see them as

memorially discursive and fully constitutive of the ambiguity and delight prized in

public modes of decorum and exchange in late Mughal India.

0.2 Project Outline

     I divide my dissertation into five chapters that concentrate on the imitation of

literary exchange in the salon, its methods of debate, mushaʿirah conventions

illustrating etiquette and manners, the sensual or aural aspects of reciting verse, and

lastly the larger historiographic implications of recitation within late Mughal culture.

The chapters also roughly move chronologically over the course of the epoch I have

chosen to study. While Chapter One concentrates on 17th century *tāzah-goʾī* poets'

concerns as they played out in 18th-century mushaʿirah debates and representations,

the dissertation ends with a history of one of the century's most famous and unusually

public gatherings at ʿAbd al-Qadir Bedil's grave which lasted until the latter half of the

1700s.

The first chapter discusses imitation within the 1700s literary sphere by examining how mushaʿirah poets engaged with larger debates on the limits of theme and meaning in Persian-based literatures, imitation, and the emergence of vernacular registers to carry these paradigms. Originality and plagiarism were major concerns for poets experimenting lyrical convention in the mushaʿirah setting. In fact, the ability to manipulate and expand on theme and meaning, as discussed in Chapter Two, had social implications for mushaʿirah participants. Inadvertent plagiarism was a major social and literary concern for poets during this time period while simultaneously there was a rise in what some considered "closed topics" or *mazmūnān-i bastah*, concepts that have been wrung dry of meaning to the point of becoming banal. Yet, the vernacular shift underway at the time, as poets began composing in Urdu, created a productive imitative and genealogical trajectory between the *tāzah-goʾī* writers and their Urdu-writing inheritors.

The third chapter focuses on utterances made in the mushaʿirah space which generated not only criticism of poets' verse, but of poets' characters as well, when personal habits and modes of speech became targets of peers' sharp and persnickety attentions. Yet, the discord of the mushaʿirah appears to breed what Losensky calls a

"generous rivalry" of poetic debate, and besides verse, the era's more readily available intoxicants and stimulants helped to fuel literary sociability. The fourth chapter takes up this sensual aspect of poetry recitation in the Mughal public sphere by examining how poets conceptualize the voice within the mushaʿirah and Persian-based literary conventions. In this instance, poets' knowledge and interest in music helped to shape how verse was circulated and how its speakers were imagined as paragons of masculine erotic potential.

The final chapter coalesces these aspects through an in-depth cultural analysis of ʿAbd al-Qadir Bedil's graveside mushaʿirah which took place every year from 1720 until about 1760. During this span, Urdu and Persian language poets used the space to legitimate, debate, and chart the historiography of Persian literary humanism in the widest possible sense. Bedil's posthumous mushaʿirah was one of the only documented public gatherings in which poets were reciting for each other in front of an audience. A mushaʿirah in which the public was involved as active listeners would not be documented again until the early 20th century, when poetry recitation would become a more performative institution and the mushaʿirah would become mass-mediated. That is not to say other public poetry gatherings were not happening in the ensuing years.

Rather, I mean only that none were not documented as such. Thus historiographically, Bedil's posthumous mushaʿirah is very unique in the way it illustrates a pre-colonial public, if not popular, setting for Persian and Urdu poetry circulation among commoners and elite alike.

Uttered verse, as will be discussed below, was a prophetic, ecumenical means of constructing a multidimensional cosmopolis that rebuilt the past and instantiated literary utopias for the future. Within this context, it is possible to understand how the mushaʿirah even today is a remnant of a Mughal public sphere. Namely, it foregrounds a linguistic and highly socialized mode of entertainment in the understudied pre-colonial past of late Mughal India. Yet, this particular mode of literary and social entertainment was simply institutionalizing a playful aspect of South Asia and greater Iran's heterogenous language sphere in which the boundaries between elite language and the vernacular were not always clear, nor were the demarcations between oral and written mediums usually sound. In turn, the mushaʿirah's historiography lays the groundwork for understanding lyricism as a type of civil construct within certain sociolinguistic settings and the recitational space of the mushaʿirah foregrounds the ambivalent

subjectivity of ghazal poetry in its immediacy as a site for circulating South Asian

literary knowledge informed by Persian literary humanism.[16]

[16] I thank Don Troyer for pointing out the nature of the mushaʿirah's lyrical immediacy.

53

Chapter 1
Welcoming Saʾib: Imagined Recitations in late 1600s Tazkirahs

My project begins by examining how written poetry exchanges imitate the quality and style of recited verse found in actual mushaʿirahs. The *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shamaʿ*'s representation of the mushaʿirah has shaped the contemporary South Asian literary imagination and is normally held up as a defining example of the fictional mushaʿirah's historiographic ability. Likewise, the fantastical mushaʿirahs found in 17th- and 18th-century writings gripped the imagination of writers who employed them as a narrative strategies to frame discussions on literary imitation and history. The mushaʿirah anecdote during this time period was diarists' method for deploying parallel verse as a way to represent past literary spheres and playful recitations from ancestral literary masters.

In this chapter, I call into question historical ideas on the *tarhī mushāʿirah* (grounded recitation) in order to reassess the social and literary assumptions made about early modern poetry recitation. The *tarhī mushāʿirah* or "grounded recitation" is the institutionalized exchange of poetry which demands its participants compose verse in accordance with a predetermined rhymed and metrical model. While the practice of

grounded recitation was indeed maintained in 18th-century poetry communities,

diarists' image of this foundational aspect of mushaʿirah sociability differs from our

current conceptions both historically and linguistically. One of my goals is to

complicate our understand of mushaʿirah sociability by attending closely to period

narratives on recited poetry.

From here, I begin to critique the imaginary mushaʿirah anecdotes of late 17th-

century tazkirahs to contextualize they way they imagined literary debates begun

earlier in the century. Interestingly, period historians and diarists' narrative modes

frame the ways in which poets conceived of literary history and the way their

recitations fit within genealogical conceptions of literary sociability. Within this

context, we begin to see how writers chronicled an implicit history of delight that only

an imaginary portrayal of recited verse with a mushaʿirah could carry. From the outset,

a few of these fantastical gatherings present instances where women wrote their verses

to be read in mushaʿirahs, informing us how period writers conceived of gendered

boundaries on wit and aesthetic legitimacy.

In the third section I focus on how imitation creates deferred mushaʿirahs

between poets separated by time and space. The poet Muhammad ʿAli Saʾib of Tabriz

(1601/02-1677) is often thought of as literary paragon exhibiting the poet's critical

ability to generously deploy and develop imitative variations. The later *tāzah-goʾī* poet

Nasir ʿAli (d. 1697) picked up this tendency to the point where he earned a title as "the

Second Saʾib." In turn, the imaginary mushaʿirah materializes in the context of sharing

verse across time and space as a way to connect with long dead masters. In particular,

imitation works as a method to "defer" the exchange of verse for poets like Nasir ʿAli

who were in search of new themes and fresh meanings in the verses of masters and

predecessors. Yet, the specificity of certain interchanges continued to shape the

historical imagination of period writers long after they actually happened. The fourth

section examines period debates from this historical point of view as writers re-

deployed anecdotes from the early 1600s to frame their contemporary setting. A

famous mushaʿirah anecdote about early 1600s poet Mulla Shaida (d. app. 1635) re-

emerges from a secretary's diary to be retold in the 1740s at a time when poets were

extremely concerned with the social implications of uttering new and original

meanings in the mushaʿirah context.

In this regard, histories of Urdu literature paint a very specific portrait of the

classical mushaʿirah and the anecdotal digressions below will appear very familiar to

any initiate into Persian or Urdu literary sociability. Yet much of what informs our understanding of Persian-based cultural institutions like the mushaʿirah has been shaped through writing on 19th-century history. Mughal Delhi's imperial fort during this time became a prominent stage for poets to gather for recitation and verse singing for each other, basing their compositions around a model verse given ahead of time. In line with this model verse, poets' compositions had to adhere to a particular rhyme, refrain, and meter making the mushaʿirah a highly competitive space where the poets' appropriate deployment of meaning and theme according to lyrical convention could be debated, argued, and enjoyed. From this 19th-century perspective, Urdu language poets were understood to hone their craft through imitative variations plucked from the ghazal universe's literary tropes. The bounded nature of Persian-based literary endeavors were presumed to mirror the mushaʿirah's socio-cultural context in which participants would be required to follow social guidelines on comportment in the presentation and reception of verse among peers.

Yet, this imitative element in the mushaʿirah space at linguistic and cultured levels was not so strict in the 18th century. Period compendiums tell a complex story about language practices, literary history, and the social practice of textuality. The play

of language and musicality of lyricism was not confined to a rarified, monolingual

sphere. In line with new approaches to historical literary cultures, we have evidence

that the social boundaries between Persian and Urdu languages; oral and written

media; and material and conceptual practice were more porous and flexible than

previously thought as (Richards and Schurink 2010; Ouyang 2013). What early modern

diarists portray is that the boundary between the literary and the social was something

continually negotiated through poetry recitation to the point where neither sphere

trumped the other. That is, the model verse or *misraʿ-i tarh* was not the sole defining

aspect of literary competition and craft within Persian language mushaʿirah spaces in

the early 18th century nor was decorum. Instead, it was only delight.

1.1 A Fantastic Model

    Around the year 1688 or so, a 20-year old poet named Faqir Allah Afrin

(1668-1741) was in Lahore sitting in the court of Nawab Hifz Allah Khan (1651-1700)[17]

when one of his colleagues would not shut up. The longwinded poet in question was an

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[17] Hifz Allah Khan was a poet in his own right and the son of the former Lahore governor Saʿd Allah Khan who had been appointed during Shahjahan's reign.

Iranian named Faridun Sabiq (c. 1690)[18] who had just arrived from Isfahan. Sabiq had

gone on the pilgrimage to Mecca, supposedly learned verse under the famous "fresh-

speaking" poet Saʾib Tabirizi (d. 1666), and had ingratiated himself to the court to be

appointed as the nawab's own Persian tutor. He had also exchanged correspondence

with the poet Nasir ʿAli, "the second Saʾib," whose verse was all the rage in the later half

of the 1600s. Sabiq seemed to be very pleased with himself and would not stop droning

a ghazal that he had recently composed. One line he recited caught the attention of

another poet there:

ز خط گفتم شود شور جنون آخر ندانستم
که گردد اول خط فتنهٔ آخر زمان پیدا

In the end, I did not think there would be such a mad tumult from the letter I
wrote;
For the first letter happened to produce destruction on par with the end of time.
(Arzu 2005: 593)

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[18] Tahir Nasrabadi notes that Sabiq is a Turk and he successfully returned from the Hajj (2000). Arzu has
high praise for Sabiq's poetry and notes his connections to Saʾib as well (2004).

A young poet from Balkh named Mirza Salih Shahadat (d. 1742/3)[19] answered Sabiq's

line with a rejoinder:

شهادت آن زمان ممنون طالع می توان گشتن
که کردم چون سخن در بزم حفظالله خان پیدا

> Oh Shahadat, the kindness of fate could only turn my fortune
> When I finally produced my verse at Hifz Allah Khan's gathering!
> (Hakim Lahori 2011: 73)

Not only does Shahadat use the same thematic construction around time or fate

(*zamān*) from the reciter's verse, teasing Sabiq for taking an eternity to perform, but he

uses the same verb order in the second line to produce a rhyme that matches the

qafiyah and *radīf*, the rhyme and refrain, of Sabiq's second line. It could not have been a

more perfectly timed comment and well-structured poem about Sabiq hogging the

gathering space. Curiously, the verses appear in two separate but coeval texts.

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[19] Little is written about Shahadat. According to Ibrahim Khalil Banarsi in his *Suhuf,* he spent most of his life in Balkh in present day Afghanistan (Ibrahim Khan Khalil 1978: 90). Additionally, Shahadat was buried in the village of Sher Khan to the west in Sabzwar where his ancestors were from. Badiᶜ Malih does not mention him, perhaps because Malih came through Balkh only when Shahadat was in Lahore. Walih Daghistani notes a Mulla Shahadat as an aside in the description of his student named Mirza Niyaz Ummid also from Balkh who died a few years before Walih completed his compendium (ᶜAli Quli Walih Daghistani 2005: 303; Muhammad Badiᶜ Maliha 2011). Bhagwan Das Hindi notes, perhaps incorrectly, that Shahadat spent his entire life in Balkh before passing away in 1155 AH (1742/3 CE) (Bhagwan Das Hindi 1958: 114).

The gathering's verses are split between Siraj al-Din ʿAli Khan Arzu's *Majmaʿ al-Nafāʾis* and ʿAbd al-Hakīm Hākim's *Mardum-i Dīdah,* both written about the same time and in similar social settings. The two writers were actually acquainted since Hakim had been a regular attendee at Arzu's mushaʿirahs. Hakim's work tells the story and give's Shahadat's rejoinder, but Arzu presents Sabiq's original verse. Simply by stumbling across Sabiq's lines with their parallel rhyme and refrain poking out of Arzu's collection of verse samples, I was able to draw a social and structural connection that runs parallel between the literature itself and the circles of poets as they traded and bartered in verse.

When some contemporary historians imagine the "classical" Urdu mushaʿirah of the 18th and early 19th centuries, they do so in highly stylized ways, often casting it in a room lit by candles with hookahs in a corner, presided over by some kind of chief or patron, and with poets reciting their verses based on a given form. In fact, the *tarhī mushāʿirah* or bound mushaʿirah has been celebrated as the recitational event par excellence in Urdu literary historiography since the late 19th century, when Muhammd Husain Azad (1830-1910) documented Urdu poets' history through his own anecdotal tellings. To an extent, there is some truth to these narratives. Persian and Urdu poets in

the 18th century and before did gather to compose verses according to parallel metrical and rhymed parameters.

The above example clearly shows two poets in a literary interchange employing parallel verse. There was, however, no model verse given that we know of upon which the poets we supposed to base their verse. Shahadat's comment was spontaneous, off-the-cuff, and that it rhymed with Sabiq's verse in addition to reworking his themes made the couplet all the more humorous in a display of the speaker's talents. At the end of the gathering, the anecdotes narrator, Afrin, finally got a chance to read. He presented a concluding couplet wholly unrelated in terms of meter, rhyme, or theme to the verses that came before:

<div dir="rtl">

آفرین تا دل ما گرد تعلق افشاند

مشت خاکی به سر مردم دنیا کردیم

</div>

Afrin, since my heart shook off the dust of attachment,
I tossed handfuls dirt on the heads of the people of the world.

Afrin goes on to tell us that:

The nawab, honor be to him, heard the line but misunderstood it and said, "You have already been brought into the world." I responded, "Whenever my heart brushes off the grit of connection, I can cope with the world." The nawab got quiet. (Hakim 2013: 71)

The anecdote is striking on two accounts. One, it appears Shahadat was obviously a quick-witted and a gifted poet. He turned around the themes, rhyme, and meter of Sabiq's poem as soon as the poet finally finished. Of course, it must have been relatively easy considering the gathering's attendees had heard the same rhyme and metrical scheme ad nauseam while Sabiq sang his ghazal. Yet, the third verse presented by Afrin, the story's narrator, is pleasant enough and seems to adhere to the gnostic sensibilities for which he was known yet it was not thematically or structurally related to Sabiq or Shahadat's verses in any way. So why did Shahadat rhyme his joke with Sabiq's verse?

Afrin's verse alludes to what historians of 19th-century literature call a *ghair-tarhī* or "ungrounded" mushaʿirah. Yet, in the 1700s, this anecdote makes it appear though a mushaʿirah would not be necessarily based around a formal model verse or *tarh.* Even the term *tarhī mushāʿirah* or "grounded exchange" would have been a neologism in the 18th century context since, as far as has been discovered, none of the period writers use it. As will be illustrated in the work below, none of the period sources mention poetry gatherings formally organized around this structural literary convention. That is not to say such gatherings were not occurring, but in the 18th

century it should not be assumed that all exchanges were governed by by the degree of

literary formality we see in the 19th century nor should we assume that the terms *tarhī*

or *ghair-tarhī mushāʿirah* were in circulation.

Yet, Shahadat's perfectly parallel rejoinder conforms to the norms of a *tarhī*

mushāʿirah, just as popular conceptions of 19th-century literary salons would have us

believe. The anecdote reveals the socio-literary convention of the *tarh* was actually an

informal element in the context of the Lahore gathering depicted above. Shahadat

comments on Sabiq's verse through an imitation because it makes the intervention all

the more apt, humorous, and memorable. We do not know the formal expectations of

Hifz Allah Khan's gathering and for the tazkirah writer they would not have been

important. Instead, for the gathering, and by extension for the the tazkirah writer

concerned with wit, humor, and eloquence, it is an appropriate and well timed couplets

that earned praise from one's colleagues and maybe a note in someone's diary.

Shahadat's improvisational acumen or *badīhah goʾī* adds a levity to the way in

which we understand the mushaʿirah as a socio-literary institution structured by the

poetry it circulates. I aim develop an understanding of the *tarhī mushāʿirah* from outside

the image of the formal courtly institution. This task will free the mushairah from the

confines of the productive but narrow imaginings of late 19th-century and early 20th-century literary historians and theorists. In many ways, the above anecdote embodies literary imitation as a central fixtures of the *social* process of crafting verse where adherence to metrical and rhyming strictures was secondary to the affiliation and agreeability of recitation with friends. I believe previous historical scholarship has reversed this, allowing for literary formality to trump social processes.

1.2 Gatherings in Absentia

قدم برون ننهد ماه من ز منزل خویش
بود چو صورت آئینه زیب محفل خویش
سهی قدان که گرفتار جلوه خویشاند
چو نخل شمع دوانند ریشه در گل خویش

That moon of mine did not step outside of its balcony;

Like a face in the mirror, he was the focus of his own *mahfil.*

Those with graceful figures are seized by their own brilliance;

With a flame straight like a date-palm, they are wounded on their own wick.[20]

Abu al-Barakat Munir (1610-1664)[21] lived in Lahore during during early 17th

century at the height of the Mughal court's patronage of *tāzah-goʾī* writers who would

set the standard for 18th- and even 19th- century debates on metaphor and imitation in

Persian verse. In his *Kār Nāmah,* Munir addresses what he saw as the degradation of

Persian literature in 17th-century Safavid and Mughal poetry. However, his argument is

not from the position of an Iranian with a supposedly indigenous claim to the language,

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[20] This poem appears at the end of the Azad Bilgrami's entry on Munir.

[21] Muzaffar Alam gives 1645 as the year Munir's passing. Bindraban Das Khushgu, who provides a great deal of information on Munir, lists his death occurring on 7 Rajab 1074 (February 5, 1664) in Agra (Alam 2003: 697; Khushgu 2010: 696). Actually, in the Iranian edition there appears to be an error for it says "*hazār wa chahāram*" (one-thousand and fourth year), leaving out the ten's place value. Yet, Khushgu does note that Munir was born in 1019 AH (1610 CE) and was fifty five-years old when he died in Akbarabad which would make the year of his death 1074 AH (1664 CE) according to Khushgu's knowledge. Later Azad Bilgrami notes 1054 AH as the year Munir died, matching Alam's 1645 CE (1913:60). Khushgu also calls the *Kār Nāmah* the *Nigār Nāmah* saying much of Munir's critique was in response the poet Mulla Shaida's objections to a *qasīdah* by Mughal poet Muhammad Khan Qudsi which will be discussed below (2010: 696).

lambasting Indians' poor understanding as one might expect. Instead he casts himself

as a "humble" Indian-born poet—specifically a Panjabi from Lahore, about which he is

quite proud—with a better understanding of the "classical" approach to poetic diction

than these up-start "moderns" from Iran coming into the Mughal court. This argument

about new forms of diction and metaphor in Persian literature would simmer into even

the early 19th century (see Naim 2006). Munir appears to have immersed himself in his

contemporaries' writings, but clearly preferred the "classical" style of India-based

writers like Amir Khusrao and Masʿud Saʿid while all the contemporary poets he

critiques are "fresh-speaking" and Iranian. As Muzaffar Alam notes in his translation of

Siraj al-Din's response to the work, Munir simply refused to acknowledge the the

complex, internal use of metaphor in *tāzah-goʾī* writing popular in the late 16th and into

the mid-19th centuries (Siraj al-Din ʿAli Khan Arzu 1974). Munir's treatise was highly

relevant for the 18th century, when the debate on new metaphor and diction took a

more urgent and productive turn in light of the increasing documentation of Urdu

literary circles. Alam writes that Arzu "was in favor of innovation and constant change

in both time and space, in consonance with the diverse social and literary traditions of

the wide world of Persian" (Alam 1998: 183-4). Though he agrees with some of Munir's

points, Arzu finds the Panjabi writer willfully immovable when it comes to rerouting language to suit new ideas and aesthetic shifts.

For our purposes, the stage in which Munir sets his critique of *tāzah-goʾī* aesthetics is in fact an imaginary *mahfil*. "One day, by fortune's magnanimity and the abundant purity of manifest grace, the elite crafters of meaning (*guzedan-i maʿnī tarāz*) and the sagacious critics of subtly (*daqīqah-bīnān-i nuktah pardāz*) gathered together for a salon (*mahfilī*)," Munir grandiloquently intones. Rather than taking a central role in the mushaʿirah, Munir imagines himself as sitting quietly on the margins of the gathering, much like Farhat Allah Beg's Karim al-Din does, to listen to the conversation of these "assayers of meaning" (*nuktah-andeshān*). As it turns out, Munir was being sarcastic when he praised his debating contemporaries, whom he accuses of perverting literature's justice.

Munir's nameless contemporaries cite four *tāzah-goʾī* poets whom they praise to the skies as paragons of literary accomplishment. The poets discussed by Munir's comrades were Jalal al-Din Muhammad ʿUrfi of Shiraz (1555-1591), Syed Muhammad Talib Amoli (1580-1626/7), Zulali Khwansari (d. 1615/16), and Nur al-Din Muhammad Zuhuri (1537-1616). These four poets were born in Iran who came to India at the height

of Mughal literary patronage during Jalal al-Din Akbar's reign. Under Mughal

patronage, they became popular in literary circles in both Safavid and Mughal domains

with their work remaining relevant and widely read through into the 1700s. These

nameless contemporaries go so far as to put down the ancient masters, saying in praise

of more contemporary poets:

> If Amir Khusrao had spoken with [the new poets] the taste of his words would
> have become sweet and if Salman Savaji had lived in their time he would have
> learned Persian from even their wives! But the likes of [these moderns] have not
> been seen in even the days prior to this current mode of literature, just as they are
> not here now, and they clearly won't come again after this era.[22] (Abu Al-Barkat
> Munir Lahori 1977 :6)

Munir Lahori finds that the current "iron-hearted" *tāzah-goʾī* practitioners and

devotees, the people gathered in his imaginary *mahfil*, "unjustly propagate the ideals of

the current days" to the point where literature becomes shapeless and lacks vision,

changing into a mere reflection. But rather than cast another imaginary mushaʿirah, as

other authors have done, Munir instead, poet by poet, critiques and delegitimates ʿUrfi,

Talib, Zulali and finally Zuhuri's verse.

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[22] It seems this tendency to even exclude the "ancients" could be found certain *tāzah-goʾī* circles. An
anecdote that Azad Bilgrami records shows Nasir ʿAli saying the verse of Nizami Ganjavi (a classical poet)
was not even worthy of the "fresh-speaking" poet Zuhuri's understanding (Lodi 1998: 63).

Tazkirahs' depiction of poetry recitation in the mushaʿirah seems to say more about the present in which it is invoked than the lyrical timelessness it seeks to conjure. In many ways, imaginary mushaʿirahs are a narrative genre all their own in Urdu and Persian literary history in South Asia.[23] Munir was simply illustrating a literary debate that had been well underway by the time he constructed his own imaginary mushaʿirah.

Munir Lahori and Beg's imaginative tellings are strikingly similar to one another in that both their narrators speak from within the text, recounting the chance occurrences, happenings, and events as they occur, blending interior and exterior temporality. The approach grounds the literary discussion in a web of ethical affiliation particular to their times. While Beg was writing about 1845 pre-uprising Delhi, his anxieties about the present came through in Karim al-Din's voice. Similarly, Munir captures a critical history of the moment in his attempt to sketch his complaints about contemporary verse in an invocation to the masters of the past. The realist and quotidian register of Beg's prose lets the ethnographic and historical dynamism of the

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[23] In the 20th century the imaginary mushaʿirah becomes the tamsīlī mushā'irah in books like *Lakhnau kī Ākhrī Shamaʿ* or ʿ*Azīmābād kā ek Yādgār mushā'irah* or the *Mushā'irah-i Zindān* about independence era poets reciting in a colonial prison. In the 1980s Durdarshan broadcast a *timsīlī mushā'irah* with actors playing modern poets like Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Salim Khatolwi. Today, *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shamaʿ* is often staged as a play (Pritchett 1994).

musha'irah speak for itself, affording Beg a larger palette of expression from which to draw. Munir, though speaking in the florid language of the early modern era, does the same when he draws a very clear picture of a literary gathering where presumably poets discuss verses of the masters. Munir, of course, does not find his contemporary *tāzah-go'ī* writers' literature worthy of praise. In both cases, the authors represent a version of reality by appealing to narrative modes that invoke a sense of the present for the reader. Reading Munir's work, one finds that the narrator is simply tapping into discussions from early 1600s Lahore on *tāzah-go'ī* aesthetics that were ongoing two generations later when Khan-i Arzu wrote his rejoinder to Munir's critique of the *tāzah-go'ī* ideals.

Sher ʿAli Khan Lodi

It seems tazkirah writers were aware of a need to conflate historical with idealized notions of literary sociability in the way that they cast the poems, particulars, and contexts of their subjects' and their subjects' recitations. Tazkirah writers employed the musha'irah anecdote to portray a paradigmatic version of the literary present. Sixty years after Munir staged his critique of *tāzah-go'ī* poets, Sher ʿAli Khan

71

Lodi answered Munir's enemies' call in his history *Mirʾāt al-Khayāl* (Mirror of the Imagination) (c. 1691-2). Lodi brought Salman Savaji back from the dead and cast this 14th-century Persian poet into a mushaʿirah using terms familiar to the 18th-century context.[24] However, Lodi does not have Savaji learning Persian from anyone's wife as Munir's enemies say he would. Lodi writes:

> Siraj al-Din Qumri hails from the graces of the poets from Transoxiana. It is said that he is one of the commanders of the *majlis.* [When] a debate (*munāzarah*) with the poet Salman Savaji happened, the convener (*mīr-i majlis*) ordered that both would test their genius on the following well-known line, "Oh spring wind, all this was brought out for you," with each one saying a quatrain to thereby reveal their ingenious natures; Salman extemporaneously composed the first one:

<div dir="rtl">

ای آب روان سرو بر آورده توست
وی خار درون غنچه خون کرده توست
گل سر خوش و لاله مست و نرگس مخمور
ای باد صبا این همه آورده توست

</div>

> Oh, the water filled cedar was brought for you;
> That thorn of the rosebud let blood for you;
> The rose is out of its head, the tulip is drunk, the narcissus is intoxicated,
> Oh spring wind, all this was brought out for you!

> Afterward, Siraj Qumri composed this:

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[24] For another instance where Salman Savaji's verse is used to legitimate literary disagreements see Appendix B.

ای ابر بهار خار پرورده توست
وی سرو چمان چمن برآورده توست
ای غنچه عروس باغ در پرده توست
ای باد صبا این همه آورده توست

Oh spring cloud, the thorns were cultivated for you;
He with a cedar-like gait, the garden was brought out for you.
Oh buds, the bride of the garden was veiled for you;
Oh spring, all this was brought out for you!

The audience enjoyed both quatrains and the [musha'irah] convener bestowed upon each of the respected poets an award of excellence.

Lodi's telling must have appeared familiar for his contemporary musha'irah audience. For our purposes, the anecdote provides a foundation from which to understand the historiography of the recitational event as a literary social fact. In short, the narration hinges on presenting the verse, first and foremost, coupled with enough relevant biographical details on Qumri and Savaji, in this instance, to let us know where they sit in the constellation of classical Persian poets read at the cusp of the 18th century. In the depiction, both Qumri and Savaji appear to have adequate rhetorical gifts to participate in Delhi's 17th- and 18th-century musha'irahs.

This late 17th-century depiction, at a cursory level at least, tells us a great deal about poetic contests in South Asia, Iran, and Central Asia. The gathering's convener

73

(*mīr-i majlis*), the audience (*hazīrān*), and the poets themselves (*shuʿarā*) are an assembly

of characters that will remain central to the examination of the mushaʿirah in the pages

to come. Perhaps the only character that might be missing in this telling would be the

patron (*sar-parast*), who in some contexts would control the means of literary

production and finance the event. Significantly, a *misraʿ-i tarh* (foundation verse) is

given from other lines that are to be composed according to its meter and rhyme.

    The paradigmatic quality of the anecdote's *tarhī mushāʿirah* centers on the

Persophone conception of literary craft as an imitative art that provides variations to

an agreed upon set of lyrical conventions. Both *rubāʿī*s hold to the rhyme and metrical

pattern of the sample verse and develop the garden metaphors of springtime and

nature's eroticism that is characteristic of the classical tone of early Persian writers.

Yet, this *munāzarah* or poetic competition could never have actually occurred since the

two poets in question did not even live in the same time period. Siraj al-Din Qumri

Amuli lived in 1184-1237 and Jamal al-Din Salman Savaji was born in 1309 and died in

1376. In fact, both quatrains are Savaji's alone. The verses illustrate the rhetorical

device of *tashaboh al-atrāf* or repetition of themes demonstrated in the repeated use of

the words *khār* (thorn), *ghunchah* (bud), and *sarv* (cedar). So why would Lodi use two of

74

Savaji's well-known *rubāʿīs* to construct a narrative of a mushaʿirah that could never have occurred?

Before we attempt to answer this question, we should note that Lodi depicts another imagined gathering between a husband and his wife. The poet is Lady Atuni, the wife of Mulla Baqaʾi, a 16th-century panegyrist known for writing a *masnawī* in honor of Mughal emperor Zahiruddin Muhammd Babur (r. 1526-1530). I include this example for its humor and as another instance of the rhymed verses of two different speakers which are metrically and thematically related in ways that illustrate their context. Atuni is the focus and, contrary to Munir's views about women's poetic abilities in Persian, its seems she could teach have taught her husband a thing or two about Persian language given the wit and humor Lodi assigns to her in this anecdote:

> Musammat Atuni was intelligent, entertaining (*majlis ārā*), and sagacious. She was the wife of Mulla Baqaʾi—Amir Nizam al-Din ʿAli Sher was a devotee of his. They say that Mulla Baqaʾi often had opportunity to have mushaʿirah with Atuni (*mushāʿirah basiyār dast mī dād*) and colorful and delicate conceits arose between them. Thus, taking turns, the mulla presented this *rubāʿī*:

<div dir="rtl">

یاران ستم بیرزنی کشت مرا

کاواک شده چونی از او پشت مرا

گر پشت به سوی او دمی خواب کنم

بیدار کند به ضرب انگشت مرا

</div>

Oh friends, the tyranny of an old woman killed me;
Because of her, this is how my ass was split:
The moment I turn my back to her to go to sleep,
With a jab of the finger she awakened me!

In response Atuni wrote:

<div dir="rtl">

همخوابگی سست رگی کشت مرا

رویی نبود از او به جز پشت مرا

قوت نه چنانکه پا تواند برداشت

بهتر بود از پشت دو صد مشت مرا

</div>

A weak-veined bedfellow is what killed me;
Except for his backside, he has no cheekiness for me.
Since he didn't have the power to get it up [he said],
"It would be better to give me a couple hundred fists to the ass."

It should be noted that the narrator has Atuni *writing* her reply (*dar jawāb nawist*) as opposed to uttering it. That is, perhaps it was acceptable for a woman of social standing to write bawdy verses such as these as speaking them aloud would be reprehensible. Of course, this is all conjecture and since this appear to be an imaginary mushaʿirah we can only extrapolate what this idealized telling would mean for elite Mughal society. Yet, in regard to the question of women's participation in mushaʿirahs, this is the second example I have found where a narrator explicitly states a female poet participates in a mushaʿirah even though it is through writing alone. This could also be narrative tendency to Lodi's writing itself since both examples come from his *Mirʾāt al-Khayāl.*

Writing about more contemporary poets, Sher Ali Khan Lodi presents another

correspondence or written mushaʿirah between a young Abu Talib Kalim (d. 1652) and

the Mughal queen, Nur Jahan (1577-1645) (Sher ʿAli Khan Lodi 1998). Lodi writes that

during the reign of Jahangir when Kalim was a young man (*naujavān*), Nur Jahan would

often present her objections to his poems through correspondence. Like Atuni and

Mulla Baqaʾi, Nur Jahan and Kalim kept a correspondence mushaʿirah going. One day,

Kalim sent a poem to Nur Jahan hoping she would stop criticizing his verse:

<div dir="rtl">

ز شرم آب شدم آب را شکستی نیست
به حیرتم که مرا روزگار چون بشکست

</div>

Out of embarrassment I became like water since you can't shatter water
To my surprise, the world would still appear shattered to me.

Nur Jahan received the poem and promptly wrote back, replying, "Ice is frozen and can

be broken." According to Lodi, after receiving this letter, Kalim had to cease his

"correspondence mushaʿirah" with the queen.

The above "conjugal" mushaʿirah between Atuni and her preacher husband

seems almost too perfect for a factual historical occurrence, the parallel verses are in

balanced imitative symmetry and they answer each other as only a fictive humorous

interchange between spouses could. By putting the words in the poets' mouths and

77

contextualizing them into the contemporary mushaʿirah-setting of his era, Lodi shows

us that extemporaneous versification, utility of proper rhyme and rhythm schemes,

and deployment of appropriate rhetorical devises are part of the aesthetic value system

incumbent upon mushaʿirah participants no matter what the topic or epoch (Pritchett

1994). Whether it was good-natured insults between spouses or a courtly competition

over classical metaphors, the focus remains on the literature.

The narrative presents nothing explicit about the decorum or "culture" of the

event beyond what is expected in an interchange between the poets. As noted, specific

modes of decorum are implied, yet the verse and the literary content of the anecdote

implies certain values characteristic of the Persophone literary culture in a wider social

sense. Frances Pritchett has this listed as an experimental category in her monumental

work on Ghalib and Mir's poetry. As demonstrated by the above verse, he category

deserves further study across other poets' works. I believe the mushaʿirah's anecdotal

verses confirm that the performative level can be embodied by the record of recited

poetry.

The social cohesiveness of the mushaʿirah's parallel verses should give us a clue

as to why Lodi was using them to cast poets as idealized reciters. The mushaʿirah space

78

was simply a formalized aspect of Islamicate literary culture in India where poets exchanged verse as a mode of sociability. In *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shamaʿ*, *Beg* was intent on showing an idealized modern version of what was imagined to be a mid-19th-century mushaʿirah. The 1845 event in Karim al-Din's print shop was turned into a fictionalized historical depiction of literary sociability. Similarly, Munir Lahori, writing in the early 17th century, cast even the unnamed colleagues he disagreed with in proper social roles befitting a *majlis*-based literary discussion. Given this tendency toward imaginary events, Lodi too was intent on depicting the social aspect of Persophone literary culture fundamental to the exchange of ideas in verse. In many ways, the verse is of foremost importance and its context as part of a recitation simply makes its aesthetic and therefore social import all the more poignant.

Walih's Women

These imagined mushaʿirah appear to be part of the literary lore that found its way into tazkirah accounts. Walih Daghistani's *Riyāz al-Shuʿarā* lists several female poets, though it's not always clear if they were participants in the semi-public recitational setting of the mushaʿirah (ʿAli Quli Walih Daghistani 2005). However, from

what we know about the oral character of tazkirah writing and the way parallel verse

illustrate imaginary or written mushaʿirahs, it appears that women's poems may have

circulated publicly.

Walih lists four women whose verse and anecdotes reshape our understanding

of late-Mughal literary gatherings. They are Bibi Zairi (ibid.: 895), Kamilah Begam (ibid.:

1878), Gulrukh Begam (ibid.: 1925), and Gulbadan Begam (ibid.: 1925). In Kamilah

Begum's entry he notes that she composed a quatrain in lamentation for the 16th-

century poet Faizi (d. 1595), but some people attributed the poem to a Salimah Begum.[25]

Walih seems to only begrudgingly note that a woman composed this verse, for in his

mind it was probably "neither a Kamilah nor a Salimah who could have written the

rubāʿī."[26] That an Indian-born lady like Kamilah Begum would understand Persian so

well seems astonishing to Walih. Thus, he takes a dismissive view towards Indian-born

poets' command of Persian as seen in a statement that he goes out of his way to include

in Kamilah Begum's entry:

---

[25] In fact this could be one of the Mughal queens who wrote under the pen name *Makhfī*.

[26]
Oh Faizi, do not take on the sorrow that sickened your heart;
Hope had hobbled your life.
It just wanted the bird of your soul to see the friend's face
In such a way that it was drawn from the cage of night.

فیضی مخور این غم که دلت تنگی کرد
با پای امید عمر تو لنگی کرد
می خواست که مرغ روح بیند رخ دوست
زین واسطه از قفس شب آهنگی کرد

80

The Persian lexicon has increased over the course of time in Hindustan and continues to increase; from what we see, its men do not know Persian and do not understand it, let alone its women. That which they call Persian in [India], its separate words are Persian, but after composing and conversing *(tarkib wa takallum)* the language *(lughat)* becomes something else *(dīgar mī shavad),* which only they themselves understand and is understood by anyone else with difficulty. (ʿAli Quli Walih Daghistani 2005: 1879; trans Kia 2011: 279)

Walih takes an evolutionary view of Persian language development in India. He wonders how an Indian woman one hundred years prior could have possibly understood the nuances of Persian verse when their men spoke it so poorly in his present. Some of the early 18th-century tazkirahs tend toward this type of contradiction in which writers' critical views of indigenous language abilities seems to conflict with their tazkirah's broad intention to capture the social peculiarities of the age. Mana Kia states, "Walih's community was expansive, including [the] mediocre and marvelous, though with the awareness that not all were alike in gender, origin, position or literary value" (2011: 280).

In regard to women's ability to be poets, Walih is ambivalent on account of his dismissive attitude of female poets in general. In the case of Bibi Zairi, she is the only female poet to whom he would afford any modicum of respect, and the only reason he does is for the fact that she has agile, "manly abilities" in literary composition. He

states, "Even though she appears as a woman, in reality she would have seized the ball

of rhetoric and skill from the field of men in the net of literature's lacrosse

stick" (*agarchah dar sūrat zan budah lekin dar maʿnī gu-i balāghat wa honarmandī bah*

chaugan-i zulf-i sukhan az maidān-i mardān mi rabudah) (ibid.: 895). He likes Bibi Zairi's

verse because it adheres to his idea of what manly verse should be, as opposed to

women's verse of doubtful origin. Walih's position appears to be opposite Lodi's more

witty and inclusive approach to women writing mushaʿirah responses.

I take Walih's conflicted feelings about Indo-Persian brought up in the context

of a female poet as more indicative of his distrust of women as poets in the first place

rather than an Iranian's regional antipathies toward variations in spoken language. As

noted above, this was a hot topic during this time period, as evidenced in Khan Arzu's

work among others. Munir Lahori used this same type of hackneyed approach when he

depicted the "unjust" modern poets of his literary community when they claimed that

if the classical poet Salman Savaji were alive in his era, the "modern" poets' wives could

improve his Persian. Munir was against "fresh-speaking" literary aesthetics not because

he thought Indo-Persian was an improper idiom. Neither were his criticisms based on

"proto-nationalism" or "ethnic" belonging. For him, Lahore is the seat of proper

Persian poetry. This evident when he cites Masʿud Salman's (1046-1121) verse which praises Lahore and adheres to Munir's opinions on maintaining the classical style (*tarz-i qudumā*). His gripes were aesthetic.

Siraj al-Din Arzu addresses some of these issues in commentaries from his tazkirah *Majmaʿ al-Nafāʾīs* in the context of a poem making fun of regional accents. While this is discussed this more in depth in the third chapter, I will briefly touch on Arzu's larger point here. Arzu was well attuned to the competitive tensions that arose between poets who would seize any weakness to put each other down, whether it was a sexual proclivity, a stutter, an unkempt beard, or a parochial judgment. From Arzu's point of view, this did not sully literary sociability, but only enlivened it. These social and competitive tensions broadened the scope of possible themes and meanings poets could use to tease and ridicule each other through poetic convention. Any gesture toward someone's wife could be taken as simple insult. This was Munir's goal when depicting *tāzah-goʾī* writers' dishonorable opinions, and Walih echoed the insult in his dismissive attitude toward Indo-Persian in general. Using Arzu's logic, Walih and Munir were simply adding a zing to their respective gripes by casting indirect aspersions on their competitor's wives.

In the case of Gulrukh Begum and Gulbadan Begum,[27] there was something stranger still that recalls Sher Khan Lodi's imaginary tellings. Again, Walih expresses incredulity at two Indian ladies' compositions. "They attribute this poem to her," he writes about Gulrukh, but at the same time he alludes back to Kamilah Begum, stating, "In this case, the writer applies the same verdict from Kamilah Begum." This seems to imply that maybe the verses were not really composed by Gulrukh or at least its highly unlikely since according to his logic Indian women knew even less Persian than their men. From Gulrukh Begum, Walih records this verse:

هیچ گه آن سرو گل رخسار بی اغیار نیست
راست بوده‌است آنکه در عالم گل بی خار نیست

There is never a time when that rose-cheeked cypress is without rivals.
But it's proper since on this planet the rose is not without thorns.

And from Gulbadan Begum, Walih notes this one:

هر پری‌رویی که او با عاشق خود یار نیست
تو یقین می دان که هیچ از عمر برخوردار نیست

It's the fairy-faced one who is not friends with the Lover.
You have to know that there is never any joy in life.

---

[27] Gulrukh could have been one of Babur's wives and Gulbadan could have been her daughter who lived into Akbar's reign and translated the her grandfather's autobiography, the *Bābar-Nāmah*, into Persian.

The names of both these ladies seem to be too poetically close: a *gulrukh* (rose-faced) and a *gulbadan* (rose-limbed). Additionally, both the poems are opening verses in the same meter and rhyme patterns as would be expected of poets exercising their skills in a mushaʿirah on particular thematic arenas and metrical models. The verse's formal structures echo the narrative intent found in Lodi's anecdotes cited above. In fact, the parallels between the two ladies and their verses are suggestive of a women's mushaʿirah. Walih is somewhat unwilling to include Gulrukh and Gulbadan because they are women, but since their verse and presumably their story were circulating among Walih's companions, he was ethically obligated to include their entries in his expansive compendium.

It is difficult to understand how women's poetry fits within the largely all-male realm of the mushaʿirah, but these anecdotes present a clue. When examining Walih's writing, the length at which he goes to denigrate certain women's literature is striking when compared to other tazkirah writers. Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi holds back no praise when writing about the courtesans and high-born ladies who wrote verse (see *Tazkirah-i Hindī*). Likewise, Mir Hasan in *Shuʾarā-i Hindī* and Amr Allah in *Musarrat-i Afzā* clearly respect and admire the few women from whom they heard verse. Finally, Lodi's

anecdotes above on Atuni and Nur Jahan, though idealized, show how women participated in musha'irahs through writing to the point they even bested their male competitors. Hence, the view that women were bad poets whose verse or literary acumen could not compete with men was not necessarily the norm.

These verses comprise a literary lore that was circulating during Walih's lifetime and his tazkirah captured a sliver of it. Poets from this time period knew verses by women and actively circulated them in social settings. Kamilah or Salimah Begum was the late 16th century Mughal courtier Bairam Khan's wife who eventually married Akbar after Bairam Khan was killed. Walih does not list her pen name, which was *Makhfi*, meaning hidden—a popular *takhallus* among Mughal women; since she was alive when Faizi passed away, it is likely that verses mourning Faizi's death would be hers. Similarly, Gulrukh was one of Babur's wives who bore Gulbadan in Kabul before coming to India. Gulbadan lived into Akbar's reign and was commissioned by the emperor to write the history of his grandfather's reign. She translated the *Bābar Nāmah* into Persian so these parallel verses could also have been between a mother and daughter or cast as an imaginary exchange between two ladies of the Mughal harem.

So what was the benefit or sketching imaginary mushaʿirahs in tazkirah narratives? In short, there is no better way to represent Persophone literary sociability than through the parallel, imitative, and infectious verse that reflects the generous rivalry of recited Urdu and Persian literature.

1.3 Deferred Gatherings in Early 1700s Delhi

رنجیده ز من بت نامهربان من
حرفی شنیدهٔ تو مگر از زبان من

My unkind idol because of me is quite glum;
The words I hear are yours, but they are from my tongue.

Paul Losensky's *Welcoming Fighani* covers Safavid and Mughal literary aesthetics, focusing on the processes of allusion and imitation (*tazmīn* and *istaqbal* or *tatabbuʿ*) as constitutive of *tāzah-goʾī* aesthetics' history. Losensky's approach reveals that poets, in their concern for adopting competent and adventurous lyrical skills, write imitative variations of previous writers' verse to master and circulate novel themes, turns of phrase, and philosophical ideas. Imitation was a way of inscribing history and aesthetic genealogy into the very structure of literature itself in a way that legitimated the status of its speaker. In many ways, imitative variation is the ideational and rhythmic center of an expansive system for generating new meanings in old tropes. For our discussion

87

of the 18th-century mushaʿirah, we can extend Losenky's argument to point out that

this imitative tendency in Persophone socio-literary institutions also produces literary

communities built around instances of shared versification. The imitation of others'

metrical and metaphorical forms (*tatabbuʿ* or *istaqbāl*) and the practice of employing the

entire lines of verse from another poet (*tazmīn*) were acceptable forms of literary

imitation. However, to craft a new meaning was a far more contentious and risky

endeavor which was often times the focus in the mushaʿirah arena. Tazkirah anecdotes

describe the "generous rivalry" of the mushaʿirah, to use Losensky's term, depicting it

as an institution that socializes Urdu and Persian literature's imitative tendency by

providing readers with the literary context where lyricism's development thrived.

Mushaʿirah anecdotes are partial artifacts of literary improvisation and delight built

from the traces of recitations and conversations recorded in poets' diaries, book

margins, and memories.

Losensky's approach to literary history shows that imitation becomes a

prosthesis for actual interchange between a master and a student. Writing about the

lineages of the "new style" or *tarz-i tāzah* or *tāzah-goʾī* aesthetic employed by Mughal

and Safavid poets during the 17th century, Losensky examines a particular verse by

Saʾib (d. 1677) in which he specifically charts his connections to the Mughal poet Talib

Amuli (d. 1625-7). Losensky notes that as a poet, Saʾib was conscious about whom he

imitated and the lineages of imitative variation that came before him.

<div dir="rtl">

هرکه چون صائب به طرز تازه دیرین آشناست

دم به ذوق عندلیب باغ آمل می زند

</div>

> Whoever, like Saʾib, is an old friend of the new style,
> Speaks with the verve of the nightingale of Amul's garden.[28]

Amul is where Talib Amuli was born and lived before he came to India seeking

patronage in the Mughal court. Even in the age of "fresh composition," in which poets

were very concerned about extracting daring meanings from extant tropes, the epoch's

literati were highly conscious of the precise utility of imitative variation. It was a mode

of connection to previous aesthetic lineages and a way of indirectly participating in the

social realm of poetic exchange. In short, imitation allows the poet to have a

mushaʿirah with masters who are out of reach.

Yet, choosing which masters to associate with or imitate was a highly political

endeavor. Sher ʿAli Khan Lodi mentions an encounter in Nasir ʿAli's gathering some

time in the late 1600s "when in an assertion over distinction in imaginative effort

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[28] Trans Losensky (1998: 199).

(*khayāl bandī*), a record of the ancestral poets came up."[29] Nasir ʿAli said, "On God's

green earth there has been no one better then Zuhuri."[30] Someone piped up, "Why are

you saying such things? One of the ancients (*qudumā*) is Nizami Ganjawi whose verse

couldn't even be understood by Zuhuri." Nasir ʿAli got testy. "You don't say. Rather, that

literature isn't worthy of Zuhuri's understanding." Lodi appears to agree with the

nameless speaker at the literary debate for he finds Nasir ʿAli words were "not empty of

boldness or incivility" (Sher ʿAli Khan Lodi 1998: 63). Driving the point home, Lodi cites

this poem:

<div dir="rtl">

بزرگش نخوانند اهل خرد
که نام بزرگان به زشتی برد

</div>

    Wise men won't sing their greatness
    Since it would sully their elders' name.

Lodi's telling makes Nasir ʿAli appear as one of the most avant-garde poets of the

gathering, though in a rather backhanded way. In fact, Nasir ʿAli's opinion echoes the

views of Munir Lahori's nameless competitors who praised the new style to the

exclusion of the "ancients." Apparently, the way Nasir ʿAli imagined the history of

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[29] We recall that Nasir was called a "second Saʾib."

[30] Nur al-Din Zuhuri (d. 1616) was an Iranian poet who settled in India's south and was patronized by the Bijapur sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah (r. 1580-1627).

literary style was through the recent past and the progenitors of the fresh style. Zuhuri
was one of these masters.

Nasir ʿAli and Saʾib

After Saʾib died and the later generation of poets furthered the fresh style of
poetry during the early part of late 1600s, there remained a concern about poetic
lineages, in which poets used the mushaʿirah space to contest authentic use of
metaphor across Persian literary history. Bindraban Das Khushgu, when writing about
Nasir ʿAli (d. 1697), notes that though he never had an actual meeting with Saʾib, Nasir
ʿAli did have an "indirect" or "absent" mushaʿirah with the *tāzah-goʾī* master (*ghāʾibānah
ba-mirzā [sāʾib] mushāʿirah dārad*) (Bindraban Das Khushgu 1959: 3). He quotes two
couplets from Nasir that illustrate what he means:

<div dir="rtl">

هر بیت من برابر دیوان صائب است
از بسکه اهل طبع مکرر نوشته‌اند

</div>

Every one of my couplets is equal to Saʾib's *dīwān*;
At least that's what those with innate talent have repeatedly written.[31]

---

[31] This verse does not appear in the copy of Nasir ʿAli's *dīwān* that I have seen (Nasir ʿAli Sirhindi 1875).

In a friendly boast typical among poets, a *mubālighah* to be more precise, Nasir ʿAli praises his own words where a single couplet or *bait* could take the place of Saʾib's entire corpus. In another verse, Nasir ʿAli spins fresh meanings into complex braggadocio:

علی شعرم بایران می برد شهرت ازان ترسم
که صائب خون بگرید آب در دفتر شود پیدا

> Oh ʿAli, my verse was bringing me fame in Iran, as I feared;
> Oh Saʾib, weep blood for luster/water shall be manifest in the manuscript.

Nasir ʿAli cast himself as the ideal poet and thus a literary Beloved of sorts whose Persian poetry would make him famous all the way to Iran. Yet, Nasir has pity on Saʾib. Employing a Qurʾanic image of the sinner in hell, the poet cast his contemporary into literary hell, crying his eyes out until there are no longer tears left and only blood. But in crying out the tears, Saʾib has washed away the letters in his own notebook where instead Nasir's words appear. This is reflected in the second line's *īhām* on the word *āb* which while literarily meaning "water" also refers to the luminosity of liquid or even the sharpness of a blade. In Nasir's verse, Saʾib has been weeping because Nasir ʿAli's book is "*mūnīr*" or lustrous (*āb paidā shudan*) like a revealed text such as the Qurʾan which is known as the *kitāb al-mūnīr* or the illuminated book.

92

Tazkirah writer Sarkhush, who was very close with Nasir ʿAli, quoted the master as saying, "The test of the poet is a ghazal's *tarh*" (*imtihān-i shāʾr tarh-i ghazal ast*) (Muhammad Qudrat Allah Gapamawi 2008: 520). For Nasir ʿAli, it was the verse of Saʾib in particular that served as the test of his poetic skill. As it would perhaps be expected, the above poem is an *istaqbal* or *tatabbuʿ*, an imitation, of a ghazal by Saʾib himself.[32]

مرا آن روز راه حرف با دلبر شود پیدا

که خط سبز از آن لبهای جان پرور شود پیدا

The day when there shall appear a way for me to speak with that heart-stealer,
The peach fuzz will begin to appear on those life-giving lips.[33]

It appears that Nasir ʿAli, to a degree, was intimately cultivating this "absentee mushaʿirah" with Saʾib as a senior poet also writing in the "fresh style" just as Saʾib had with the Mughal poets that preceded him. In another verse that appears in his *dīwān*, but not in Khushgu's tazkirah, Nasir ʿAli states:

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[32] Saʾib actually wrote two ghazals with the same rhyme, refrain, and meter.

عیار حسن ز صاحب نظر شود پیدا

که قیمت گهر از دیده ور شود پیدا

The deception of beauty shall be manifest for the men of vision,
For a pearl's price will appear by looking at it.

[33] On an another note, Saʾib's verse may be an imitation of this second line by Hafiz:

ایا معشوق هر قدسی چو می دانی چه می پرسی

که سر عرش و صد کرسی ز تو ظاهر شود پیدا

Oh Beloved, because you know every angel, what would you ask?
The topmost heaven and one hundred thrones shall be made manifest for you.

خون گشت علی سینه‌ام از مصرعهٔ صائب
در پیرهن غنچه چه خارست ببینید

Oh ʿAli, my chest bled because of Saʾib's verse.
Is there a thorn in the blossom's shirt? Just look!

Nasir ʿAli's verses speak to the generous rivalry between poets that exists in actual mushaʿirahs or deferred into the imaginary mushaʿirahs charted in verse. In the case of this last ghazal, Nasir ʿAli composed a *tazmīn* or quotation of Saʾib's line from the following couplet:

در جامه خود چاک زدن بی سببی نیست
در پیرهن غنچه چه خارست ببینید

It is not without reason to rend one's own clothes.
Is there a thorn in the blossom's shirt? Just look!

Yet the lineage of imitative variation does not end with Saʾib, for he himself states:

این آن غزل اوحدی ماست که فرمود
ای بی بصران این چه بهارست ببینید

That ghazal of Awhadi said this to us:
"Oh you blind men, is this springtime? Just have a look!"

Sure enough, Awhad al-Din Awhadi Maraghai (1271-1338) has a ghazal that ends with the following couplet:

94

شرح سخن اوحدی آسان نتوان گفت

شعرش بهلید این چه شعارست ببینید

It was difficult to give a description of Awhadi's words.
Leave the poetry to him. Is this even a poetry competition?[34] Just see!

Given the previous discussion on the imaginary mushaʿirah as a narrative

device, the *mushāʿirah-i ghāʾibānah* further complicates how we understand tazkirah

writers' narrative logic in recording mushaʿirah verse and mushaʿirah anecdotes.

So far none of the gatherings discussed in this chapter, except for Sabiq, Afrin,

and Shahadat's interchange in the introduction, actually were considered to have taken

place history. Yet, they all share a poetic resonance through their parallel verse in what

Khushgu refers to as a soiree in absentia, the *mushāʿirah-i ghāʾibānah.* Like Khushgu,

Losensky notes how parallel imitative verse creates historical and genealogical

connections across time through indirect poetic interchange where the old ustads are

welcomed into the present and made new.

In the imitative lineage I just traced between Awhadi, Saʾib, and Nasir ʿAli, the

original verse from Awhadi tells much about how to understand the mushaʿirah's

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[34] From Dehkhuda:

شعار. [ش ِ] (ع مص) مشاعرة. (ناظم الاطباء). رجوع به مشاعرة شود.
Shiʿār means mushaʿirah according to Dehkhuda's definition.

historiography as recorded in poetic tazkirahs. It seems these veins of imitative poetry themselves reveal the multidimensionality, for lack of a better term, of the mushaʿirah's generous rivalry. Awhadi implies, boasting about his poetic skill, that it is better to simply perceive his verse at the moment of utterance in a mushaʿirah or *shiʿār,* as he states, rather than attempt to describe what he may or may not have meant or how his verse aligns with the false opinions of uninformed contemporaries.

In many mushaʿirah anecdotes, when poets argued over a particular usage, a given reciter would defend his or her composition through appealing to the masters, calling their influence and inspiration into the present by invoking their names and verses. This is a concept to keep in mind when Bedil's graveside mushaʿirah is examined below in which his students and followers memorialized him in recitation. Yet, it was not just Bedil being called back from the grave but a host of writers like Hafiz and Saʾib as poets invoked their writings to legitimate poetic usage at moments of contention. At the end of the imitative genealogy we just traced, Awhadi poses a pertinent question from the grave to his imitative interlocutors, Saʾib and Nasir ʿAli, asking them, "Is this even a mushaʿirah that we're having?" With Bindraban Das Khushgu's idea of an "absentee mushaʿirah" and Paul Losensky's concept of imitation as literary

historiography, poetic utterance in the recitational gathering appears omnipresent across time and space according to these imitative strands linking contemporary poets' recitations with the incarnations of Persian literature's pasts.[35]

This direct lineage between Awhadi, Saʾib, and Nasir ʿAli was carried forward into the 18th century as contemporary poets kept these time-traveling *tazmīn*s going. Sarkhush, who, as noted, was a great friend of Nasir ʿAli, heard someone reciting from one of the poet's *masnavī*s. The reciter was an old, illiterate poet saying:

<div dir="rtl">

الهی ذرهٔ وردی بجان ریز
شرر در پنبه زار استخوان ریز

</div>

Oh God, cast a trace of the rose's scent on my soul.
Ignite sparks in the cotton field of my bones.

Sarkhush, who often praised Nasir ʿAli in mushaʿirahs, laughed and improvised this response:

<div dir="rtl">

چرا این حاجت از من خواهی ای یار
توانم کرد من هم این قدر کار
که مشتی حسن با آتش فروزم
همه مویی سرور پشت بسوزم

</div>

---

[35] In the final verse sample from the chapter on Bedil's grave, even Bedil's epitaph was a way for a *tāzah-goʾī* poet to get an "ancient" master to speak to him in the present by reading his pen name into the second verse which he composes as a quotation of Saʿdi's poem.

<div dir="rtl">

پیش از این گفت سعدی شیراز
بیدل از بی نشان چه گوید باز

</div>

In former times Saʿdi of Shiraz said,
"Oh Bedil with no headstone, what can be said?"

> Oh buddy, why wouldn't you have made this request of me?
> I could have also done this exact job.
> For there happens to be a perfect fistful of tinder with me,
> And I would have burned off all the hair on your drunk ass.

Nasir ʿAli's verse has the Lover requesting God to ignite sensual passions down to his marrow, comparing the Lover's white skeleton, drying and bleached white by the sun in a desert, to cotton which is used to hold the scent of perfume. The image of the desert full of cotton plants or the *panbah-zār* is a staple of lyric imagery, a place the Lover would rather turn into a rose garden, with flowers blossoming between his white bones. In Nasir ʿAli's verse if the desert can't bloom with roses to remind the long-dead Lover of the Beloved, at least a drop of rose oil on his bones would enflame his passions and bring him back to life. Cotton fields, like a Lover's bones, are also easily ignited by even the mere scent of a rose which is powerful enough to send everything up in flames. Sarkhush flips the austerity of Nasir ʿAli's verse into a lampoon on this poor, unlettered old man in some mushaʿirah, claiming his speech is like a tinder (*ātash-firoz*) that would set a person ablaze from head to foot, let alone a field of cotton.

In another instance, the chronicler Afzal Beg Qaqshal writing in the 1740s met a local *qāzī* named Wafa in the *qasbah* of Elchipur, the district seat of Berar in the south,

who carried the deferred mushaʿirah forward. While Wafa had a knack for writing prose

and long poems, he was also adept at ghazal composition. When Qaqshal visited him

they had a small, impromptu poetry recitation where Wafa demonstrated his imitative

variations (*tatabbuʿ*) of a verse form used by Abu Talib Kalim (d. 1652), Saʾib, and Nasir

ʿAli. From Kalim his cites this couplet:

نه تنها بهر قتل من کمر بسته است شمشیرش
که در ترکش برای کشتنم پر میزند تیرش

> To slaughter me it's not only his sword that he keeps at his side,
> For he stocks his quiver full of arrows for my killing.

Then from Saʾib he quotes this ghazal:

ز شست صاف از دل می جهد گرم آنچنان تیرش
که از بوی کباب افتد به فکر زخم نخجیرش

> From his taught bowstring he innocently releases flaming arrows such
> That the smell of kabobs sets him to thinking of his prey's wounds.

From Nasir ʿAli, further reflecting this late *tāzah-goʾī* composer's intimacy with Saʾib,

Wafa presents this couplet:

ز الفت بسکه میساید گلو بر تیغ نخچیرش
چو برگ گل ز رنگ خون نگردد پاک شمشیرش

> To the extent that out of love he rubs the throat of his prey on his dagger,
> Like the petal of a rose, his sword was not cleaned of the color of blood.

And finally Wafa composed his own response and recited it for Qaqshal:

<div dir="rtl">

لذت بسکه دلچسپ است تیغ لطف تأشیرش

شود مثل رگ گل جز تن در زخم شمشیرش

</div>

To the extent that the taste is alluring to the piquant dagger of his mandibles
One shall be like the vein of a rose clipping in the wound from his sword.
(Afzal Beg Khan Qaqshal 1921: 122)

The recitation was a pleasant memory for the tazkirah writer and Qaqshal was obviously impressed by this local litterateur's achievements. Additionally, the imitations show the genealogy of *maʿnī āfrīnrī* as four generations of poets moved the idea of a blood thirsty Beloved armed to the teeth, quite literally by the time we reach the last verse, through several variations, employing a uniquely rhymed vocabulary that centers on weapons and hunting—*shamshīr* (sword)*, nakhjīr* (prey)*, tīr* (arrow) and *tāʾshīr* (mandibles)—though the last word is not usually related to hunting Wafa successfully makes it so.[36] Elchipur was not a backwater by any stretch, but it was not the literary hub that the local urban centers of Burhanpur, Aurangabad, and Hyderabad were during this epoch. Wafa's intervention in this particular imitative stretch is unique in that he employs the obscure word *tāʾshīr* referring to the mandibles of a

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[36] It should be noted that E'jaz Akbarabadi's teacher ʿAbd al-ʿAziz ʿIzzat also composed an imitation based on this line (see Appendix B).

locust, giving the Beloved a truly strange appearance. Qaqshal notes that Wafa decided

to give up a career in the Mughal administration, unlike his father Hakim Muhammad

Taqi Khan, who had been in the service of one of the infamous Sayyid Brothers, Husain

Ali Khan (d. 1720), Wafa was simply content composing poetry on the side while

earning some money teaching Arabic and hadith. He also dabbled in divination in

connection with local shrine of Ghazi ʿAbd al-Rahman at which he participated in the

yearly *ʿurs*. Every year Wafa would recite a *nazm* about the lamp-lighting at this popular

local gathering. Given the economic activity shrines attracted, Wafa probably benefited

from the pilgrims' donations as well.

The deferred gatherings can easily be traced in close readings of poets' lineages

even outside the recitational setting of the mushaʿirah. Given the centrality of imitation

in Persian and Urdu literatures, these connections are overdetermined in both the

written and oral realms. While we should not be surprised to find structural and

linguistic connections across time and space in Persian and Urdu literary cultures, the

way in which tazkirah writers present imitative verses should change our conceptual

model for the mushaʿirah's historiography. As I have said before, to expect a cultural or

descriptive representation of the mushaʿirah in tazkirahs is to miss the point of what

the musha'irah as an institution attempts to propagate. In fact, such an approach

forgoes the central aesthetic axis of Persian and Urdu's literary universe. If verse is

prophetic, playful, and timeless through its imitation, why wouldn't its social

institutions be similarly structured and in turn represented?

1.4 Unending Arguments

        In some instances the need for imitation sustained legendary musha'irahs over

several generations. A comedic poet patronized during Jahangir and Shahjahan's reigns

poses an interesting set of dilemmas for tazkirah writers during the early 1700s. The

satirical poet Mulla Shaida (d. around 1635)[37] was most famous for constantly teasing

and criticizing the poets of the Mughal court during the earlier half of the 1600s.[38] Of

his many lampoons, the more famous ones cited in tazkirahs between 1662 and 1769

were against Abu Talib Kalim, whom Shaida calls a dog (Sher 'Ali Khan Lodi 1998);

another against the poet Hakim Khaziq who he tells to write poetry with his penis to

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[37] Tazkirahs provide dates ranging from 1632-35 and even as late as 1660. See Shah Nawaz Khan (2009: 444).

[38] Shaida's is also famous in tazkirah chronicles for a block of prose he wrote decrying Iranians for criticizing his Indian inflected Persian.

save money (Muhammad Afzal Sarkhush 2010: 111). On another occasion when Khaziq

recited a poem for him Shaida noted that the poet must have been feeling like an

effeminate little boy when he wrote it so Khaziq threw Shaida in a pond (Bindraban Das

Khushgu 1959: 74; Muhammad Afzal Sarkhush 2010: 73). Lastly he called Amir Allah a

catamite by citing a phrase from the Qurʾan (Siraj al-Din ʿAli Khan Arzu 2004: 819;

Bindraban Das Khushgu 2010: 332):

<div dir="rtl">

نه تنها من همی گویم که امر الله مفعول است

خدا فرموده در قرآن که أَمْرُ اللَّهِ مَفْعُولًا

</div>

I'm not the only one who says Amir Allah is "acted upon;"
God thus decreed in the Qurʾan, "Amir Allah is a bottom."[39]

For literary historians and poets during during this epoch Shaida was most

famous for his verse-by-verse metered and rhymed critique of a *qasīdah* by the poet

laureate Haji Muhammad Jan Qudsi (d. 1646), a popular poet in Shahjahan's court (r.

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[39] This was the son of Shaida's patron the famous literary patron and Mughal administrator, ʿAbd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan (1556–1626). The lampoon against Amir Allah is funny because Shaida uses a phrase in the Qurʾan as an *īhām* or double entendre. The Arabic phrase *amru-allahi mafʿūlan* in the Qurʾanic context of Surat al-Nissa 47 and al-Azhab 37 means, "God's will be done." Shaida plays with the multiple meanings of *mafʿūl* as a passive grammatical object. On a side note, Amir Allah must have been Khan-i Khanan's younger son seeing as he was still alive after the transitionary years between Akbar and Jahangir's reigns. Khan-i Khanan's two eldest sons were executed on Jahangir's order and their bodies were hung from one of Delhi's gates when their father did not support Jahangir as the new emperor during the succession conflicts. Shaida is also cited in ʿAbd al-Baqi Nahawandi (2002: 810).

1627-1658). Tahir Nasrabadi is the first to record this interchange, noting Shaida found

it "lacking in meaning" (*be-maʿnī*) (Muhammad Tahir Nasrabadi 2000: 323):

عالم از نالهٔ من بی تو چنان تنگ فضاست
که سپند از سر آتش نتواند بر خاست

Without you, from my lament, the world is closing around me,
To the point the wild rue could not be raised to the top of the flame.

Nasrabadi himself takes a similarly critical stance on Qudsi's writing when he

finds that some of the first verses in the beginning of a *qasīdah* lack cohesion.[40] Shaida,

on the other hand, responded with seven couplets on only the first line of the *qasīdah*,

followed by presumably more arguments that our tazkirah writers do not record but

that Khan-i Arzu explores very deeply in his *Dād-i Sukhan*. Notably, they frame the

whole argument as a *munāzarah* or competition. Sarkhush in his *Kalimāt al-Shuaʿra*

makes it sound like the verses were read aloud in a public context, noting that the

"gentlemen of literature enjoyed the exchange" (2010: 110). Given this project's

discussion thus far it would be highly unlikely if the lines in question were not recited

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[40] Khushgu writes that Arzu weighed in on even this comment when he wrote in the margin of his copy of Nasrabadi's tazkirah that such a critique was unfounded since initial couplets of a *qasīdah* are bound by ghazal-styled aesthetics so they in fact do not need to cohere. This approach was not employed by earlier writers, so Arzu notes, but the late poets would use it regularly (Bindraban Das Khushgu 2010: 565).

before Qudsi and Shaida's community of fellow literati. For the uninitiated reader, we note that Shaida's critique matched Qudsi's rhyme (*qāfiyah*) and meter. Sher Ali Khan Lodi in his *Mirʾat al-Khayāl* (c. 1692) records Shaida's response where Shaida states that Qudsi's verse lacks internal cohesion in that constrictedness (*tang-fizāī*) as an emotional state is quantitive while as a spatial import it is qualitative (see Appendix C).

One of Shaida and Qudsi's contemporaries named Jalalai Tabatabai, who came to India around 1615, wrote a response to Shaida's critical *qasīdah* in the form of a satirical *qitaʿ* where he cast Shaida as a "glass demon with a clapboard memory" (*bah mahā dev-i maqwā yād*)—an appropriate image of constraint in and of itself (Siraj al-Din ʿAli Khan Arzu 2004: 818). Additionally, Abu al-Barakat Munir Lahori wrote a parallel, versified critique of Shaida's commentary on Qudsi's *qasīdah*—a critique of a critique. Lahori accuses Shaida of being rude and willfully misreading Qudsi's intent, stating, "Hey literary critic, if there shall be any how or why to your critique, / It is that rancor is not a quality befitting literary gentlemen." That is to say, Shaida was being too literal and should have taken away a more figurative and ambiguous meaning (see Appendix D).

The competition remained fresh, relevant, and continually debated into the first half of the 18th century. In particular, the "fresh style's" inheritors, including Bedil's

devotees such as Mukhlis, Khushgu, and Arzu, were keen to weigh in on how the

literary contentions started in the *munāzarah* between Shaida and Qudsi implicated

their own imitative verse. For instance, in the 1720s when Khushgu went to visit Anand

Ram Mukhlis, a poet named Nauras, who liked Shaida's critique of Qudsi, tried to come

up with a better first line to Qudsi's second:

<div dir="rtl">

منع بی طاقتی سوختگان تا اینجاست[41]
که سپند ازسر آتش نتواند برخاست

</div>

The powerlessness of the charred ones is prohibited to here:
For the wild rue could not be raised to the top of the flame.

As we know Khan-i Arzu also commented on this critique of a critque in *Dād-i*

Sukhan, becoming a third voice, but in prose this time, to Shaida and Munir's debate,

and using it as a platform to advance his particular understanding of literary

explication (cf. see Dudney 2013: 263). While Arzu does not agree with Shaida's

approach, stating that he is in fact being overly literal, he does agree that the verses are

not cohesive enough to be enjoyable. In this regard, he also agrees with Munir who

shows that the term *tang-fizāʾ* (lit. "narrow space" but is construed to mean

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[41] In the Tehran edition of Khushgu's *Safinah* this line and the same story falls to a different 17th century
poet named Latifi (2010: 606).

<div dir="rtl">

منع آسودگی سوختگان تا اینجاست

</div>
    The prohibition of rest for the charred ones is to here:

"uninhabitable" or "despised") is an *īhām* or ambiguity in an of itself. For Arzu, Qudsi's poetic intention and the unity of the verse itself could be bettered served with the following small change:

عالم از دود دلم بی تو چنان تنگ فضاست
که سپند از سر آتش نتواند بر خاست

> Without you, from the smoke of my heart, the world presses in on me,
> Such that the wild rue could not be raised to the top of the flame.

In a more dialectic fashion, Arzu notes that both Shaida and Munir have a shared goal in understanding the perception of metaphor, though perhaps misdirected at times. The verse becomes more unified when it's the smoke from the heart that makes the world feel constraining, as opposed to the Lover's wail or lament which does not always produce smoke necessarily though it is implied according to convention.

In 1750, a new anecdote about Shaida surfaces in the tazkirahs which narrates a gathering that took place in Ajmer during the middle years of Jahangir's reign when the court's coterie of poets, who were trekking around Hindustan with the emperor's camp, banded together for a musha'irah in Ajmer. The imperial camp, to which Shaida was attached, was there on account of Jahangir's devotion to the shrine belonging to Sufi saint Moʿin al-Din Chishti, and the ongoing campaigns against the stubborn rulers of

107

Mewar to the east. The interchange illustrates how theme was argued and critiqued in

the musha'irah setting. Walih Daghistani is the first to note this detailed interchange

which he copied from a diary (*bayāz*) that once belonged to the gathering's host, a

munshī named Sheikh Firoz who was later the secretary for Shahjahan's prime minister

Sa'd Allah Khan Bahadur.[42] As Walih does in his tazkirah, I present the whole

interchange as Firoz presumably recorded it in his *bayāz.*[43]

The Competition of the Munshī and the Mulla

In the *hijrī* year one thousand twenty four (1615 CE), when Jahangir's globe-
trotting camp (*ūrdū-i gihān pā-yi jahāngīrī*) had cast its lodging in the country of [Ajmer],
may God keep it from discord and pestilence, many of the great artists and poets of
every land were assembled together. In those of days of auspicious beginnings and
prosperous ends, this assembly was the new spring of the world, the the young bride of
the age—what was called the Imperial Cavalcade.

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[42] Sa'd Allah Khan's daughter Wazir al-Nissa married Ghazi al-Din Firoz Jang I who created the religious
endowment for the madrasah named after him, Madrasah-i Ghazi al-Din Khan. This would be a famous
staging ground for many musha'irahs from 17th century through the late 19th century when the
madrasah was renamed Delhi College.

[43] Another version of this competition also appears in a *bayāz* called *Safīnah-i Bahr al-Muhīt* at the National
Library of Iran by a writer named Khalil Allah Sheikhun Shatari from around 1736/7. Plainly, the
anecdote had been circulating for some time or at least the *munshī* Firoz's dairy was. More research is
needed to trace this anecdote and the possibility of a copy of Firoz's diary itself being in existence
(Muhammad Khalil Allah Ghulam Shiekhan Ahmad Shattari 1739).

Everyday in every house a gathering with this congregation or a celebration with that company would happen. One day, by a stroke of good luck, several of these respected individuals such as Mulla Anwar Lahori, the writer of these lines:

درین حدیقه بهار و خزان هم آغوش است
زمانه جام به دست و جنازه بر دوش است
به جرم باده گرفتند باز انور را
کفن به دوش و صراحی به دست و مدهوش است

In this garden Autumn and Spring are in mutual embrace;
Time is the goblet in hand and the coffin on the shoulder.
They have grabbed Anwar again in the crime of wine-drinking,
With a funerary shroud on his shoulders and flask in hind, he is drunk, again.

...ʿAtaʾi Jaunpuri, the speaker of these lines:

مرگ آمد و بی هیچ به در رفت ز کاخم
چون غارتی از خانهٔ ارباب توکّل

هر لحظه خطش خوبتر اندر نظر آید
همچون خط اوستاد که بینی به تأمّل

Death came and left with nothing from my mansion;
As the plunder from the lords' home has already been entrusted to someone else.

At just a glance, his letter becomes better in my eye,
Just like the letter of an ustad that you read with concentration.

...Mulla Mukhtaraʿ, who composed this couplet:

در شکستم چند کوشی ای بت نامهربان
من پریشان خاطرم زلف پریشان نیستم

Just try to destroy me, oh cruel idol,
I am disarranged myself, yet your tresses are not disarranged for me.

...and Mulla Tifali, the author of the *Shāh o Māh*, all had a lively gathering in my humble abode.

Then, all of a sudden, Mulla Shaida appeared out of nowhere. My colleagues held him in great contempt on account of his meaningless incantations and obscene curses which they knew well. Often times, Shaida would take hackneyed themes and parade them around for all to see like adopted sons dressed it up in fancy clothes.

The gathering allowed for some to solicit a poem from him, and I, who has memorized a portion of verse from the poets of the present age and from the ancient men of speech, do in fact have some compassion for him.

At that moment, when he arrived near the gathering space (*bazm-gāh*), which he had resolved to make into a fighting space (*razm-gāh*), the respected members shifted their seats, welcomed him in, and, with total honor and respect, politely asked him to sit. It was then that the friends of wondrous speech each started praising his intellect. They entreated him to recite from the wares of his sound nature and true imagination. He said the following verse:

چیست دانی باده گلگون مصفا جوهری
حسن را پروردگاری عشق را پیغمبری

Hey assayer of clarity, what do you know of rose-colored wine?
It is the godliness of beauty and a prophecy of love.

I said, "This poem is comparable to one by Rudaki:"

عشق را اگر پیمبری لیکن
حسن را آفریدگار تویی

If love is prophecy then
Beauty is God, like you.

He grimaced in confusion and, giving absolutely no acknowledgement of my words, recited this:

زبس که کرده غمت بند در جگر ناخن
چون پشت ماهیم از پای تا به سر ناخن

To what extent would a nail fixed into the liver trouble you?
"I'm like a turtle—shell from head to foot!"

110

I said, "Ah, this opening line is sweeter and fatter than a similar verse from Ghayasi the Confectioner[44] (*halwāʾī*):"

از بس که سینه کندم و ناخن بر او نشست

چون پشت ماهی است سراپا سینه‌ام

To the extent that he sticks out his chest to me and digs his nails in he says,
"See, just like a turtle, I have a breast plate from head to toe."

He got perturbed and, taunting my guests' and my knowledge of poetry, recited another verse:

گر به صحرا موفشانی دشت پر سنبل شود

ور به دریا رو شویی خار ماهی گل شود

By scattering your hair in the desert, the wastes shall be filled with hyacinth;
If you wash your face in the river, the fish spines shall become roses.

"Oh, I said, "two hundred years ago Mulla Katibi had coincidently composed a poem similar to one by Rumi:"

گر به دریا افتد از عکس جمال او فروغ

خار ماهی آورد در قعر دریا بار گل

If the reflection of your beauty were to light up the sea,
All the fish bones in the ocean's depth would blossom into flowers.

As soon as the couplet left my tongue, he started uttering pointless and nonsensical things, saying, "If you're going to oppress me with satire, just try to match this couplet!"

ذات تو بود صحیفه گون که کرد

از روی ادب مهر خدا بر پشتت

Your reputation was the color of a sheet of paper. Hence,
Out of courtesy, the Seal of God was stamped on your behind.

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[44] Tahir Nasrabadi mentions this poet in his work (2000: 341).

111

"Friends, allow me some justice," I said, "If it was Shaida who must have stolen a beautiful jewel from from the treasure horde of Rumi's speech seven hundred and fifty years ago, then what is Rumi's sin?"

نبوت را تویی آن نامه در مشت
که از تعظیمت آمد مهر بر پشت

The prophecy of what you are is in that letter in my fist;
Out of courtesy to you, the seal was left on the back.

The friends started laughing uncontrollably. At that moment with his innate ugly temper and coarse ways, he erupted in curses and foul language. My colleagues asked him for a rebuttal. From there he recited:

زلف او را رشتهٔ جان گفتم و گشتم خجل
زانکه این معنی چو زلفش پیش پا افتاده است

I called his tress the thread of my life and became bashful;
Thus this meaning, like his hair, has turned out to be banal.

"I keep observing a great deal courtesy and hospitality here," I said, [feigning respect], "otherwise, I shall recite a good friend's poem:"

کس نیابد معنی پیچیدهٔ زلف کجت
گرچه این معنی تو را در پیش پا افتاده

No one can understand the complexity of yours hair's twisted meaning;
Although, this meaning has become quite common for you.

In the end, a few more poems were read aloud to the extent that each of us had recited equally. Afterward, a few friends asked to present a poem. Other than silence, no answer was given until the gathering (*majlis*) reached its end and the conversation expired. From then on for quite a while afterward, Shaida never recited his own verse in what ever *mahfil* I happened to be present at. One day, however, in Kashmir, coming to my house, Shaida started up a conversation and said, "Did any one of my verses happen to please your higher nature?"

"Yes!" I said, and recited this verse:

ای به روی تو گرو آینه را چشم نیاز
شانه را دست دعا در شب زلف تو دراز

Oh, the wishful glance is a pledge to the mirror in front of you,
May the hand of prayer comb out your long tress tonight.

He drew out his hand to give a blessing and said, "May your life be long so that this too is your reward."

The anecdote presents a contrasting image of a tazkirah-based musha'irah episode in which sociability is built around the use of metaphor as opposed to rhyme, refrain, and meter. The first ghazal from the competition is one of Mulla Shaida's most famous.[45] It was said that the emperor Shahjahan, Jahangir's son, heard Shaida's friends singing it and became very displeased on account of Shaida praising "the mother of all evils" (*umm al-khabāʾis*) causing him to banish to Shaida from Mughal lands (Sarkhush 2010: 110). Given Shahjahan's own love of alcohol and the social acceptability of writing verse about wine, it would appear to be just a good story. In fact, several tazkirah writers use the verse and the anecdote to frame a *qitaʿ* Shaida wrote in praise of Shahjahan that he sent back to the emperor from Kashmir where he supposedly lived in exile form the court. Firoz's anecdote through Walih's *Riyāz al-Shuʿarā* alludes to this as

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[45]

Hey assayer of clarity, what do you know of rose-colored wine?
It is the godliness of beauty and a prophecy of love.

چیست دانی باده گلگون مصفا جوهری
حسن را پروردگاری عشق را پیغمبری

well when Shaida and the *munshī* met in Kashmir year later. Shaida did retire there but he was likely not exiled.

The anecdote itself is one of the most engaging episodes from the mid-1700s' tazkirahs that illustrates the politics, sociability, and conventions of literary debate. Though its context falls well before this project's historical scope, its depiction appears during the middle of the 18th century during a time when Shaida's poetry itself was still creating debate and imitation. To date, I have not found it mentioned in any 17th century compendium; it only seems to come up in the 18th century in Walih's tazkirah and a 1700s *safīnah* housed in a library in Tehran. Yet, we have to ask, is it an imaginary mushaʿirah? Given the uneasy boundary between idealized forms of sociability and actual literary talents which tazkirah writers revel in, the seemingly researched responses and well-timed humor could appear contrived.

Subsequent tazkirah writers such as Arzu and Khushgu picked up references to the debate, but did not provide the level of detail nor the complete narrative arc as it appears in the *munshī* Firoz's depiction. Only Ahamd ʿAli Khan Hashmi in his *Makhzan al-Gharāʾib* copies the entire episode as Walih presents it, correcting the location from Gujarat to Ajmer (Ahmad ʿAli Khan Hashmi Sandelvi 1970: II:988). The appearance of

114

the story informs the reader on how anecdotes appear, stitched into the fabric of verse, forming an aspect of the literary patchwork tazkirah writers were attempting to create.

Walih echoes Firoz's critique that Shaida's poems are derivations of others' themes (*māʿkhūz az mazāmīn-i dīgarān*), before voicing that he found the anecdote in Firoz's own diary copied in the *munshī's* hand. Yet, it is impossible to detect Firoz's intentions for recording the scene of this thematic mushaʿirah in Ajmer. Yet, Shaida's verses and Firoz's rebuttals lead us back to the idea of the deferred mushaʿirah in tazkirah-writing's historiographic enterprise.

As with other anecdotes, the context of the mushaʿirah only amplifies the poignancy of the verse. Firoz aims to show us that he knows the literature of the ancients and his contemporaries to the extent that he can defeat the infamous Mulla Shaida, a literary philistine whose lampoons and satires put him in poor social standing with the other courtly literarti. From this stance, it is the creation of meaning that acts as the unifying but contentious force binding the narration with the lines. Critiquing another's poem, taking apart their supposed "new" themes, is an overdetermined form of literary criticism. What could be a bookish process, however, Firoz instead stages as a mushaʿirah. This position reiterates an earlier point on the narrative choices tazkirah

writers made. They were often poets themselves interested in and attuned to

community of connoisseurs debating specific ethical and aesthetic attributes of an

emergent literary culture.

In spite of what could be perceived as imaginative aspects in this telling,

however, I am inclined to think this event did occur and Firoz depicts it with only some

embellishment. For one, Firoz was not the only one to have seen Shaida in Ajmer. Taqi

al-Din Awhadi (1565-1623?) notes in his massive tazkirah *ʿArafat al-ʿĀshiqīn* that he also

saw Shaida in Ajmer around this same time (Taqi al-Din Awhadi Balyani 2009: 2061-2).

Arzu records 1616 in the Pakistani edition and the 2012 edition from Tehran lists

1611/12—it could be either date since the *hirjī* year would be 1025 or 1020 respectively,

a copyist could easily switch a zero and a five which look similar in some scripts.

Secondly, the imperial histories state Jahangir was in Ajmer in 1615 with the imperial

horde on account of the military campaigns in Mewar, and he was definitely in the city

itself during July of that year for Moʿin al-Din Chishti's *ʿurs* where he handed out food

and donations to the supplicants.

Like the other depictions, Firoz brings the reader into the ring of the mushaʿirah

itself, albeit with a playful and slightly sarcastic tone. Many of the lines are funny in the

116

context of a gathering where two poets employed them to multiple ends, making veiled

accusations about one another's characters. Apparently for these writers even the

Beloved's tresses (*zulf*) had become banal (*pesh-i pā*) in the mushaʿirah space. Firoz tells

us in the beginning that to use others' metaphors, even the meanings created by

classical writers, is ethically suspect since it parades falsity as lyrical imagination;

hackneyed themes are at best adopted sons in undeserved finery. Though Firoz accuses

Shaida of making the gathering space (*bazm-gāh*) into a fighting space (*razm-gāh*), the

question remains on what the secretary's intentions were; he too seems equally battle-

ready.

On account of his sharp tongue, the mushaʿirah attendees resented Shaida,

considering that some had probably been targets of his barbs, but to show proper

comportment and courtesy, they allow him to join them and recite verse.[46] At the end

of the anecdote, we see Shaida's vulnerable side when he visits Firoz in Kashmir,

seeking reassurance on his literary merit. After being wounded so terribly by this

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[46] Shaida was not without friends for Saʿd Allah Masiha from Kairana, who translated the Ramayana in Persian as *The Story of Ram and Sita*, was friends with Shaida, writing (Khushgu 2010: 621; Walih 2005: 2191).

<div dir="rtl">

در من و شیدا نماند اندر حقیقت امتیاز

من به شیدا مانم و ماند به من شیدای من

</div>

Between Shaida and me there is no distinction according to deeper truth.
I'm still crazy about Shaida, and he's still mad about me.

upstart secretary at the Ajmer gathering, in the preceding years Shaida had held his

sharp tongue when ever Firoz happened to also be at a mushaʿirah.

Firoz's project is a highly overdetermined enterprise given the bounded nature

of theme and meaning within Persian and Urdu literatures. Urdu mushaʿirahs in the

latter half of the 1700s show how the development of meaning (*maʿnī āfrīnī*) was a

highly contentious endeavor. For the mushaʿirah context, the issue becomes starker yet

as what was recited quickly became dogma as the coterie of listeners, patrons, and

fellow poets would memorize and scribble down a recited poem if it passed muster. As

Firoz's story illustrates, a particular metaphor or image-deployment was subject to a

wide array of criticism and assessment for not just proper lyrical usage, but also for

originality. Even in the last example recited in the mushaʿirah Shaida attempts to make

a critical commentary on the trope of the Beloved's tresses, stating the image is banal

or *pesh-i pā*. Firoz in his rejoinder attempted to show that even when commenting on

hackneyed meanings Shaida was a plagiarist.

It is to be expected that the aesthetic tenets of the *tāzah-goʾī* movement would

be actively debated and tested in the mushaʿirah setting in which poets attempted to

expand meaning through new metaphorical usages. While Firoz intended to show that

118

Shaida's approach was an inauthentic connection to past literary traditions, the

concern poets had for the deployment of original topics is highly productive for

developing an understanding of imitation within the musha'irah context during this

time period.

William L. Hanaway, Jr. in an *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article makes an interesting

note about the literary concept of imitation within the nascent *bāz-gasht* movement just

beginning in Iran during the latter 1700s:

> The device *tażmīn*, the use of a direct quotation from another poet's work, is a
> more explicit appropriation of the past than is *esteqbāl*. As used by poets before
> the Zand period (Iran 1750-1794), it served as a means to tie the literary
> tradition together as it evolved. The resulting web of intertextual patterns kept
> the past alive in the present and allowed the tradition to look simultaneously
> backward and forward at any one time. (1989)

Hanaway's definition confirms that poets used imitation of not just rhyme and metrical

formations but also images and meanings as well to create aesthetic bridges across

literary history.

For the poets writing in the first half of the 1700s, Shaida's career and verse

seems to serve multiple goals and ideologies. Saʾib wrote about three dozen of Shaida's

ghazals down in his *bayāz* which Khushgu relied upon when he wrote Shaida's entry in

his *safīnah*. Additionally, Khushgu heard an anecdote about Shaida from Saʿd Allah

Gulshan who told him that Abu Talib Kalim gave him a *masnavī* he had just written to get Shaida's opinion. He in turn wrote a bunch of satires about Kalim at the end of the manuscript (Bindraban Das Khushgu 2010: 330-1). Also Bedil told Khushgu another story in which the poet Hakim Khadiq threw Shaida in a pond after Shaida read his *dīwān* and said Khadiq must have taken it all from an anthology of other people's verse. When brought before the king to explain his actions, Khadiq renounced poetry, saying he only wrote explanations of the Qurʾan verses and interpreted hadith. Simiarly, Bedil wrote an imitation on two of Shaida's verses and so did Azad Bilgrami and several of his students (Shaʾiq 1924-6: 110-11). Also, Sarkhush notes that this particular verse by Shaida came up in a literary gathering one time:

بسکه بنگاشته اشکم رخ کاهی از خون
مژهام بسته بهم چون پرماهی از خون

> To the extent that my tears shall have painted my pale face with blood,
> My eyelash is gummed up with blood like a trepan.

Sarkhush quickly responded with an impromptu imitative variation on Shaida's particularly gruesome image of the Lover crying blood:

بسکه می ریزد سرشک از دیدهٔ گریان ما
بسته از خون چون پرماهی بهم مژگان ما

> To the extent that my crying eyes are scattering tears,

120

My eyelashes are all covered with blood like a trepan.

In an overly critical way, Arzu finds Sarkhush's verse to be wholly unrelated to Shaida's on account of the poet not adhering to Shaida's rhyme and metrical pattern.

Conclusion

Aside from its entertaining draw and narrative allure, why did Walih decide to record this anecdote at a time when originality and theme were being debated so heatedly in both the mushaʿirah context and in contemporary treatises? Writing in the early 1760s, about four years after Walih had died, the poet and chronicler ʿAbd al-Hakim Hakim Lahori (1707-1769) remembered a particular interchange he had with the Walih that might provide a clue about his intention to include the Shaida and Firoz competition anecdote in his tazkirah. Hakim Lahori writes:

> One day, while practicing a ghazal, Walih recited this couplet to me, and said, "no one has the opportunity (*majāl*) to compose poetry these days." Then at that very same moment he said to me, "you should also compose something during this practice." (see Appendix E)

Walih's first statement after sharing his line with Hakim could be interpreted in several ways. The word *majāl* could be translated as "ability" or "leisure" in edition to "opportunity" or even "strength." Hakim's statement at the end provides another

example of a parallel mushaʿirah verse that uses Walih's pen name ("enamored" or "distracted") in a line with multiple intents, complimenting Walih's "distracting" line that urged Hakim to compose his own verse.

Hakim was close friends with Walih during their time in Delhi and they would often gather in the company of another poet named Sharf al-Din ʿAli Wafa. While Wafa had recited many verses in these gatherings, Hakim could not remember a single one and instead turned to Arzu's record of Wafa's verses in his *Majmaʿ al-Nafāʾis.* Arzu states that Walih and Wafa were also quite close, often composing their own imitative variations on Hafiz's famous line opening of his *dīwān.*[47]

In an age when poetic meaning itself was highly politicized in public literary space and even between students and teachers, Walih's challenge to Hakim maybe read

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[47] Hafiz's first couplet:

الا یا ایها الساقی ادر کاساً و ناولها
که عشق آسان نمود اول ولی افتاد مشکلها

Oh Saqi, come fill up the cup and give it to me,
For in the beginning love was easy then it turned difficult.

Wafa composed this verse:

نسازد عشق ضایع رنج عشاق بلاکش را
هنوز از نقل فرهاد است شیرین کام محفلها

Love does not ruin the misery of afflicted lovers,
Now Farhad tells us that Shirin is the Belle of the Ball.

And Walih added his own take:

خوش آن روزی که می گفتند می خواران به محفلها
الا یا ایّها الساقی ادر کأساً و ناولها

I've been glad since the day the wine drinkers have said to the parties,
"Oh Saqi, come fill up the cup and give it to me." (Hakim 2010: 129)

122

as a larger commentary on what it means to publicly recite verse in the mushaʿirah

setting. During the early 1700s, perhaps no one had the strength, ability, or leisure to

compose verse, since claiming a metaphor or new meaning as one's own had the

potential to create such conflict. When one's reputation is on the line, poets need to

take care in claiming meanings as their own especially before a crowd of peers with vast

amounts of poetry they quote at a moment's notice. Walih's original line according to

which Hakim composed his verse was notable and difficult—this was also a challenge

occasionally documented in tazkirahs where a poet will present a verse claiming that

no one could respond to it. Yet, when understood within the larger context of Walih's

socio-literary life, we see that he had been actively involved in exploring older themes

from the classical writers as well. In no way should we assume that this was unique, as

any poet would be crafting imitative variations on old themes. Walih's association with

Wafa and Hakim is simply one of many common-place friendships easily traceable

through parallel verse.

      Nor should we assume that the competitive spirit between poets was unique or

even particularly mean-spirited. For the 18th-century chroniclers, the competition

between Firoz and Shaida had an affect of immediacy. Many of the anecdotes presented

here have centered upon discord and debate in the mushaʿirah setting. Ghulam

Hamdani Mus'hafi, writing at the end of the 1700s on the Urdu context, noted that

many regular mushaʿirah gatherings would not last more than a year before breaking

up over some kind of conflict and even Mir Dard had to transfer his regular mushaʿirah

to Mir Taqi Mir because the participants started conflicts. Though Firoz's anecdote took

place in the early 1600s, Walih reintroduced it for readers, who were poets in particular,

during the mid-18th century to capitalize off of its continued social relevance. Firoz's

construction of the *bazm-gāh* or "gathering space" being turned into a *razm-gāh*, the

"battleground," was obviously a familiar concept to mushaʿirah participants during this

time—as will be discussed in the following section—and the idea remains with us even

into the present age. Dehkhuda's definition from the introduction holds true: the

mushaʿirah space was ripe for competition.

As demonstrated in these anecdotes, however, the competitive spirit in the

gathering space needs to be contextualized. In the case of Shaida and other 16th-

century Mughal poets, the stories of their debates remained relevant for tazkirah

writers to understand their present. Importantly, these retellings were not confined to

the prison of the scribe's pen. In the mushaʿirah space itself the poets were seeking new

meanings in the fresh mode and were in fact intimately aware of the "ancients" with

their verse regularly becoming a topic of discussion and imitation. Walih including the

particular anecdote on Shaida and Firoz in its entirety helps us to understand the

contentious role theme and meaning had for *tāzah-goʾī* poets grappling with not just the

classical verses of the "ancients," but still trying to understand the new, meaningful

themes crafted by their immediate predecessors in the 17th century. In fact, using Mir

Hasan's logic in his *Shuʿarā-i Hindī*, the poets of the early 17th century would have

already been ancient (*qadīm*).

Also writing in the middle of the 1700s, Shahnawaz Khan in his *Bahāristan-i*

Sukhan presents us with a final anecdote copied from Sher ʿAli Khan Lodi's *Mirʾāt al-*

Khayāl that illustrates how tensions over theme, originality, and literary history spilled

over into the mushaʿirah space. It appears to cast an older poet into a contemporary

mushaʿirah setting, bringing the "fresh-speaking" poet Saʾib's voice into the final mix

of our discussion on meaning's politics in the mushaʿirah:

> One day, in the *majlis* of Zafar Khan, the governor of Kashmir, Saʾib was reciting
> his verse and voices of praise were coming at him from all sides. All of a sudden
> a young Kashmiri boy, who was infamous as the plaything of dirty old men
> (*ʿillat-i mashāʿikh*), appeared and said, "Other than altering phrases and
> switching words around, the poets of our generation have no art. Have the

ancients left no topic undone (*mazmūnī-i nabastah*)?" Smiling, Saʾib improvised this ghazal:

اهل دانش جمله مضمون‌های رنگین بسته‌اند
هست مضمون نبسته بند تنبان شما

For the most part, the sages of old have already set the delightful topics;
The only undone topic here is the draw string on your breeches.
(Shah Nawaz Khan 2009: 503; Lodi 1998: 71)

Chapter 2
Slapping Wali: Measured Friendships and Generous Rivalries

In 1719 two poets exchanged conflicting poems memorializing an event that would cause a bifurcation in literary gatherings for some years. The chronicler, diarist, and poet Azad Bilgrami used these interchanges to comment on the divisiveness of mushaʿirah sociability. "As a congregation they are polite but in packs they behave badly (*jamaʿī bah nekī mī kunand wa garohī bah badī*), he states (see Appendix F).

This chapter examines the spirit of competition, contentiousness, and churlishness that permeated mushaʿirah sensibilities during the 1740s and into the early 19th century. According to the mores of time, poets are apt to show courtesy when assembled together, but quickly resort to skulduggery when the smallest social slights split them into factions. This chapter points to the connections between these two linguistic spheres through an analysis of how Urdu and Persian-language poets both grappled with issues of originality and accusations of plagiarism. I then describe how the poets Yaqin and Hazin exhibited conduct in different mushaʿirahs that earned them criticism in both the social and literary realms, which can also be understand as highly overlapping realms.

Since there were few "unfixed topics" during this time, inadvertent plagiarism was something to be expected amongst a group of nitpicking poets who would accuse each other of it at the smallest slight. The term unfixed topic refers to a meaning, idea or set of associations that has not yet become a crystalized as a trope the Persian literary imagination. Shafiq Aurangabadi comes in as the voice of reason with a versified critique of poets' narrow-minded sensibilities when it comes to inadvertent plagiarism, showing that composing the same meaning is actually an overdetermined process.

The second part of the chapter specifically examines the Urdu literary sphere and the imitative paradigms that created social cohesion between poets writing during this time. To do so, I examine two contexts. First, I analyze Hatim and Arzu's gatherings in Delhi during the 1740s in which are found implicitly documented gatherings between Mir and Sauda in addition to a handful of minor poets. Next, the focus shifts to the 1770s and 1790s in Lucknow to understand the mushaʿirah feud between Insha and Mus'hafi. Even though this feud-turned-fiasco left Mus'hafi insulted, it did goad him to start his own smaller gatherings which he documented in his final tazkirah. This

section shows how friendships and social connection are reinforced by the stricture of poetry's formal aspects.

2.1 The Intimate and Contentious Nature of Plagiarism

At end of the last chapter, Saʾib's rejoinder to the young man reveals how finding unfixed topics was a contentious issue for Mughal- and Safavid-era poets. It was fittingly spoken by one of the most famous 17th-century writers searching out new and fresh meanings through imitative paradigms. Poets composing in the fresh style of the time sought to expand the limits of Persian linguistic and aesthetic structures, hence finding unfixed topics or *mauzūn-i na-bastah-hā* was an important social aspect of crafting meaning (*maʿnī yāftan*) through imitating but tweaking the topics, frames, and metaphors of the ancients' lyrics. "The path to the new went by way of the old," writes Paul Losensky. "In their innovations, they worked to revive and maintain the creative spirit of tradition" (Losensky 1998: 138-9). Yet, there were politics involved in theme and meaning. Imitations had to be written to preserve the poets' sense of justice (*insāf*), a concept often ascribed to literature of the time; any unsubstantiated deviation from acceptable poetic utterance was a transgression against not just aesthetic standards but

against the social norms of proper literary comportment. As I explained in the previous chapter, this idea of the "poets' law" should not foreclose the possibility of delight in even the transgressions. The issue of plagiarism (*sarqah*) and accidental plagiarism (*tavārud*) became contentious topics during the 1740s' mushaʿirahs or at least the poets of the time began documenting these literary showdowns (Grunebaum 1944). To be accused of either form of plagiarism while taking a theme or coming up with a new idea, was not necessarily the mark of death for a poet, but it did provide a route for poets to bring something of the battleground (*razmgāh*) into their salons (*bazmgāh-hā*).

The issue of *sarqah* or outright plagiarism was a more serious accusation in the mushaʿirah. In one gathering in 1750s Aurangabad, the poet ʿAbd al-Qadir Mahrban (1737/8-?), the a student of Azad Bilgrami and friend of Lachhmi Narayan Shafiq, presented the following poem under his old pen name, *Rangīn*:

خمارم بر نتابد منت صهبا کشیدن ها
ز فیض چشم یارم سر خوش بی خود طپیدن ها

I am drunk, red wine's favor did not turn away its pourings.
On account the eye of the Beloved's generosity, the palpitations make me uncontrollably tipsy.

Several of ʿAbd al-Qadir's friends said they had heard the verse from the tongue of Ziya al-Din Husain Khan (d. 1758) who also wrote under the pen name *Rangīn* and

they accused the poet of plagiarism (*sarqah*). ʿAbd al-Qadir gathered the mushaʿirah attendees and marched them over to Ziya's home to defend himself against these accusations. Ziya heard the line, carefully saying, "I did not recite this verse under my name and this is just a case of our pen names being homonymous" (Lachhmi Narayan Shafiq Aurangabadi 1928: 298).

After the gathering, Ziyaʾ al-Din realized he too could be accused of plagiarism since both he and ʿAbd al-Qadir wrote under the pen name *Rangīn*.[48] In order to avoid the risk of other members of Aurangabad's literary community also accusing him of plagiarism in the mushaʿirah space, he wrote an epistle in verse requesting ʿAbd al-Qadir to change his pen name because the confusion was causing him so much ambivalence. "For *rangīn* is my pen name, please return it to me / my heart is wounded, because of our pen names' homonymy," he states (see Appendix G). The young poet agreed to stop writing under "*Rangīn*" and his teacher, Azad Bilgrami, named Qadir *mahrbān* or "generous" for granting the elder poet's request.

Outright plagiarism was arguably a noxious plight as it could compromise a poet's reputation both inside the mushaʿirah ring and in the networks of bazaar-

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[48] Of course, there would be a third Rangin, Saʿdat Yar Khan (1756-1827) who was just a small boy when this competition in Aurangabad occurred.

131

gossips. Mahrban knew his literary and social character were at stake so he took the

mushaʿirah to the streets, so to speak, showing up at the elder poet's door. Since Ziya al-

Din was getting on in years and couldn't generate more poems under a new *takhallus*

(pen name), it made the most sense for Qadir to give up his and emerge as Mahrban,

preserving both their reputations.[49]

Inadvertent plagiarism, by contrast, is more humorous and playful for poets

since all littérateurs carry *tavārud*. Abu Talib Kalim (d. 1651) composed a poet's take on

inadvertent plagiarism as quoted by Shafiq in his *Chamanistan-i Shuʿarā* (c. 1762) where

the Mughal-era poet examines *tavārud* as perhaps a venereal disease:

<div dir="rtl">

منم کلیم به طور بلندی همت
در استفادهٔ معنی بجز خدا نه کنم

بخوان فیض الهی چو دسترس دارم
نظر به کاسهٔ دریوزهٔ و گدا نه کنم

ولی علاج توارد نمی توانم کرد
مگر زبان به سخن گفتن آشنا نه کنم

</div>

I am Kalim with aspirations lofty as Mt. Sinai.
I make no exception toward even God in the attainment of meaning.

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[49] The issue of pen name homonymy played out in another instance between the early 1700s poets
Ahmad Yar Khan Yakta and Muhammah Ashraf Yakta which also culminated in a mushaʿirah face off. See
Bindraban Das Khushgu (1959: 95, 190, 280) and Bhagwan Das Hindi (1958: 261-4).

Recite! For I have the grace of God within my reach.
I do not consider myself a dervish with a begging bowl.

Yet, I could not treat my inadvertent plagiarism,
Unless I stop being intimate with composing verse altogether. (1928: 169)

The metaphor of *tavārud* as an illness is fitting given the mushaʿirah's form of literary

sociability that seems to elide social conventions with lyrical intent. In the gathering

space, inadvertent plagiarism is a social disease, something no one wants to catch but

when mushaʿirah protocol is broken accusations of its spread fly from poets' mouths.

2.2 Rhetorical Vigilantes and Promiscuous Poetics

جو کچھ کہیں یہ تجھ کو یقین ہے سزا تری
بندہ جو تو بتان کا ہوا کیا خدا نہ تھا

No matter what you say, Yaqin, this is your punishment.

When you became a slave to the idols, was there no God?

<div align="right">Inʿam Allah Yaqin (1727-1755)</div>

In mid-1700s Delhi, there was an unusually virulent strain of *tavārud* affecting

some poets. This was not too long after the poet and literary arbiter ʿAbd al-Qadr Bedil

died in 1720. Yet, in the mid-1700s there is no more famous argument over Persian

metaphor and originality then the rancorous literary duel that erupted between the poets Siraj al-Din Khan Arzu (d. 1756) and Muhammad ʿAli Hazin (d. 1766).

Around the year 1744 Arzu took it upon himself to weed out several hundred of Hazin's verses in order to critique them for improperly employing certain tropes and constructions. As Dudney and others have shown, Arzu was keen to make a distinction between vernacular language, as something acquired, and literary language, as something learned (Dudney 2013, 2014). Besides his ongoing linguistic and philological pursuits, some unknown slight or competitive tension with Hazin spurred Arzu to write this explication of Hazin's verse. He called his work *Tanbih al-Ghaflin* or *The Admonition of the Negligent* named after a 10th-century book on morals and conduct by Abu Laʿis Samarqandi (d. 983). Some thought Arzu was being overly critical and slightly rude, so one of his detractors, Siyalkoti Mal Warsatah (d. 1762), a Hindu Panjabi from Lahore, responded with one missive entitled *Jawāb-i Shāfī (The Categorical Answer)* and possibly a second called *Rajm al-Shāyatīn* or *Stoning the Devils.*[50] The debate did not stop there for it was quickly picked up by Walih Daghistani who was in the middle of composing his gargantuan tazkirah *Riyāz al-Shuʿarā* (c. 1748), and later by another Lahori and friend of

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[50] This title references the Meccan tradition of throwing rocks at representations of evil as Abraham did in a story cited in the Qurʾan.

Walih, Hakim Lahori, in his *Mardum-i Dīdah* (c. 1750), which he later completed in Aurangabad.[51]

While Hazin's literary fight with Arzu and his allies produced many pamphlets and missives on poetic usage, one has to keep in mind the complex social life of Delhi. This was a particularly rich time both for musha'irahs and for tazkirah writing. Listed from the earliest patrons in the 1720s to that last in the 1760s and beyond, some of the regular musha'irah patrons over this time period were Gulshan, 'Andalib, Arzu, Hazin, Khushgu, Ummid, Qabul, Mazhar Jan-i Janan, Hatim, Dard, Mir Taqi Mir, Mir Hasan, and Mus'hafi. All of them were active poets and cultural arbiters in their own right, amassing communities of students, devotees, listeners, fellow poets, hangers-on, and royal patrons. Additionally, many of the musha'irah impresarios and their coteries attended the famous 'urs musha'irah at Bedil's grave. This was a yearly festival for verse recitation and reading from Bedil's work which was highly regarded by "fresh" aficionados during this time and into the 19th century. It is probable that many of Delhi's poets and intellectuals writing missives, tazkirahs, and poetic treatises during this time were spurred by this rich musha'irah culture.

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[51] Hakim was a student of Faqir Allah Afrin, the Punjabi mystic poet and opium addict, and was regular attendee of Bedil's 'urs gathering because of his admiration of Arzu.

Competition was expected in the mushaʿirah's literary space to the point where its participants reveled in the discord. Tazkirah writers also wanted their readers to enjoy the contention of literary debates which they occasionally captured in anecdotes and hinted at by quoting rumors. Some writers have noted that the details of Hazin and Arzu's feud were included in tazkirahs to shame one side or the other (Kia 2011: 219; cf. Dudney 2013: 155 footnote). Would it not be more productive to see the inclusion as something entertaining? While the competition's origins are somewhat opaque, one theory holds that it began in a mushaʿirah.

Hazin and Arzu

Hazin had already been in Delhi for about five years when Dargah Quli Khan visited his mushaʿirahs during his time away from Hyderabad in 1739. Quli Khan, who was a regular a several gatherings, gives a detailed description of the preparations that went into readying Hazin's home for the mushaʿirah's attendees. During the early, evening his home's central patio would be swept and sprayed down so that even the portico would "bestow the radiance of a polished mirror," to use Dargah Quli Khan's words (1993: 79-80). It would appear Hazin's sense of mushaʿirah-based aesthetics and

136

entertainment had taken root during his youth, when he would wander around

Isfahan's gardens reciting verse with his friends (Muhammad ʿAli Hazin 1997: 174). At

his mansion in Delhi, carpets would be laid out on the courtyard's central raised plinth

for Hazin's band of poets and hangers-on to sit on and discuss verse. From this central

stage of the salon, Hazin would perform his role not just as the host of the gathering,

but also as a performer with particular styles of gesticulating (*harkat-i laṭīf*) and reciting

his verse that would delight and entertain the audience (*ziyāfat-i sāmaʿ-i muntazarān*).

Quli Khan records a verse from Hazin that he most likely heard at the gathering before

jotting it down in his diary:

<div dir="rtl">

شعلۀ شمع مسلسل ز دل آید بیرون
آۀ دل سوختگان متصل آید بیرون

این گهر نیست که نشمرده به خاک افشانم
اشک گلرنگ بصد خون دل آید بیرون

</div>

The candle's flame kept blazing out from the heart;
The sighs of the scorched ones' heart continually came out.

These are not innumerable rubies that I scatter on the earth.
These hundreds of rose-colored tears are the heart's blood seeping out.

Hazin's notion of salon entertainment ran both ways, from the refined to the

acerbic. Sarfaraz Khan Khatak quotes a sentence from Husain Azad's *Nigāristān-i Fārs*

137

where after calling Nasir ʿAli's and Bedil's verses incomprehensible, Hazin states, "If my return to Iran were possible, there would be nothing better than [their poetry] to serve as as an object of derision in my friends' salons" (*barāʾī-i reshkhand-i bazm-i ahbāb*) (Khatak 1944: 32).[52]

Hazin was one of the last notable and widely travelled members of the Persian-speaking literate class to come from Iran to India to earn a living under Mughal patronage. Yet, the popular and at times justified image of Hazin living in India is that of an Iranian who misses Isfahan and Safavid society, enduring the hardships of Mughal India while deriding his new home and its inhabitants. Hazin wrote *hajv-hā* or lampoons on some of the locals he encountered, most notably Kashmiris. Yet, during his ten or so years in Delhi, Hazin's house became a center for poetry gatherings, competing with Arzu's well-known salons and Garami Kashmiri's "Qabuliyan contingent" who would show up at Sufi celebrations and once even came to Hazin's house itself when the Iranian first arrived in Delhi. Judging from tazkirah writers' anecdotes of their visits to Benares, where Hazin moved in 1744, he received visitors for small gatherings and one-on-one poetic interchanges, but it appears that the grandeur and hubbub of Hazin's

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[52] We should probably be critical of Azad attributing this statement to Hazin. He bases his *Nigāristan-i Fārs* on a source from Hazin that no one else has seen.

Delhi-based mushaʿirahs had ended. Mus'hafi even went so far as to say that Hazin

simply spent his days sitting on a grave plot that he had set up for himself just waiting

to die (Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi 2007: 33-5).

While in Delhi, the mushaʿirahs at Hazin's home were designed to be spaces for

Delhi's notable and chief poets to come and recite their verses or to send poems along

for the master's correction (Khatak 1944: 32). Writing during the 1740s when all this

was taking place, Husain Dost Sambhali (c. 1750) tells a story in which a verse by Arzu's

friend Muhammad Afzal Sabit (d. 1739) had been sent along to Hazin's gatherings.

Hazin looked at the verse and said it had been cast from someone else's theme, accusing

the late Sabit of *sarqah* or outright plagiarism (2008: 138). Sabit's son Muhammad Azim

Sabat (d. 1748) heard about this, and in revenge distilled 500 verses from Hazin's newly

circulating *dīwān* where he found the exiled poet himself had plagiarized others'

metaphors and themes. As Mana Kia writes, citing Khatak, Sabat's ulterior reason for

nit picking Hazin's *dīwān* may have been that one of his father's former students, Sher

Afgan Khan Basiti, did not come to him for instruction on his verse (Khatak 1944: 51).[53]

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[53] Occasionally sons inherited their fathers' students to maintain an atelier's lineage. Garami inherited his father's coterie and earned the appellation of the "Qabulian contingent" since Garami's father's name was "Qabul" and Mir Dard lead his father ʿAndalib's group.

After Sabit died, Afgan instead shifted his allegiance to the very poet who had insulted his former ustad: Hazin himself.

Sher Afgan followed Hazin to Benares and eventually settled in Lucknow, marrying into Khwajah Basit's family and taking an oath of allegiance to the Sufi's brotherhood. In fact, Basit was famous for his Sufi and poetic salons and the controversy his father caused in Delhi when he converted to Shiʿism and began patronizing spiritual listening sessions (*majlis-i samaʾ*) to the disapproval of a Multani preacher (see Chapter Four). On account of this, Sher Afgan took the pen name Basiti whereas before he had been Sabiti when learning under the late Afzal Sabit. Though neither Husain nor anyone else mentions the poet's name, it may have been Sher Afgan himself who happened to be at Hazin's mushaʿirah on that fateful day in the early 1740s to show the Iranian master his late ustad's poetry. Perhaps Hazin's criticism of his former ustad caused Afgan to pledge himself to the Iranian master. As for Sabat, he died soon after writing his tirade against Hazin's verse.[54]

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[54] Khatak cites several anecdotes from Husain Azad's *Nigaristan-i Fars* in which poets had sent in their verses for correction by Hazin in his salons (Azad 1922: 212 cited in Khatak 1944: 43).

Walih Daghistani presented an extensive section of Sabat's complaints against

Hazin. Most of the entries are fairly straightforward ones in which Sabat presents one

of Hazin's lines:

ساکن درای قافلهٔ ما نشد حزین
در هجر و وصل این دل نالان به ما نساخت

Oh Hazin, my caravan bell did not become quiet.
In meeting and separation, this lamenting heart was not content with me.

Sabat follows the couplet with a line from a second poem to show exactly how Hazin

took another's theme. In this case, the example is from Saʾib:

در هجر و وصل کار دل ما تپیدن است
دایم به یک قرار دل بی قرار ما

In meeting and separation, my heart's job is to palpitate.
My unsettled heart is permanently fixated on one person.

In this refutation, Hazin was also using the theme of the heart's labors during the

meeting and separation of the Lover and the Beloved. Sabat's contention would have

been that Hazin was not obtaining his own fresh meanings when crafting this verse on

the heart's work since Saʾib had already employed them.

In another more damning instance, Sabat provides evidence of Hazin actually

stealing someone else's lines. Sabat states, "In no uncertain terms Mirza Tahir

Nasrabadi in his tazkirah has written both lines under the heading for Fayiz

Abahri"(ʿAli Quli Walih Daghistani 2005: 649):

ز مژگان ساختم گلگون چنان چنان روی بیابان را
که داغ لاله کردم مردم چشم غزالان را

سواد دیدهٔ من صورت نقش نگین دارد
ز بس افشرده‌ام بر چشم اشک آلوه مژگان را

Since I cast redness from my eyelashes on the face of the desert,
I scarred the tulips to the remorse of those masses of doe-eyed people.

The black of my eye has a seal pressed on to it,
Insomuch as I have pressed my tear-covered lashes to my eye.
(Muhammad ʿAli Hazin 1995: 92; Muhammad Tahir Nasrabadi 2000: 495)

While some of Sabat's examples from Hazin's theme-stealing are weak and could

simply be instances of inadvertent plagiarism (*tavārud*), to masquerade another's entire

verse as your own was a serious transgression in Delhi's literary community. In the

mushaʿirah setting and in tazkirah commentaries, this was a fairly common occurrence

treated with disdain, but profitable for political maneuvering between competing

literary camps. The leader of the "Qabuliyan sect," Garami, was accused of reciting

others' lines (Siraj al-Din ʿAli Khan Arzu 2004: 1362), and Walih lists in his tazkirah a

poet named Sayyid Muhammad Shoʿlah (c. early 1700s) whom he heard recite at a

mushaʿirah parading one of Ahli Shirazi's verse as his own (ʿAli Quli Walih Daghistani

142

2005: 1163). Even the great Nasir ʿAli was accused of reciting a verse that belonged to the poet Mulla Nadim at a salon (Siraj al-Din ʿAli Khan Arzu 2004: 520).

On one occasion Nasir ʿAli was visited by the poet Rafiʿ Khan Bazil from Gwalior (d. 1707/12) when he was having a gathering with his students and friends. Infamous for his arrogance and self regard, it seems Nasir ʿAli was rather disappointing as an ustad for he seemed more intent on cutting his visitor down to size rather than encouraging the junior poet's endeavors. Bazil recited a line from his compositions:

دل داشتیم دادیم جان بود عرض کردیم
چیزی که یار خواهد صبراست و ما نداریم

The heart that I have I gave and give now was living, I said;
The thing that the Beloved wants is patience and I don't have it.

Deriding him, Nasir ʿAli said, "Sahib, now recite from your own work," causing the other listeners in the mushaʿirah, probably Nasir ʿAli's hangers-on, to chuckle.

In Hazin's *dīwān*, it is clear that the poet did compose other couplets for the poem in question and did not lift Fayiz's entire ghazal, but the evidence is irrefutable that Hazin marked the lines as his own. Hazin could have been using the lines as a quotation or *tazmin*, but usually only one line would be quoted and Fayiz was not even remotely famous enough in Mughal India, or even Safavid Iran for that matter, to have

143

been so recognizable that the literati would understand the reference without being prompted. Hazin either heard the lines recited by someone else and took them as his own or read them in the Nasrabadi's tazkirah (c. 1662-80) or someone else's notes. While Hazin would hold up Nasir ʿAli and Bedil's works as objects of derision for his friends back in Isfahan, Sabat and Arzu were presenting Hazin's work in order to mock it in Delhi's literary scene.

For poets during this time period, there was nothing imaginary or even socially paradigmatic in seizing originality through the search for new meanings and lyrical associations. Writing correct poetry maintained the justice of the literary sphere, confirmed good standing in Mughal society, and had material implications. The tazkirah tradition was a socially nuanced textual practice connected very closely with the oral realm of the mushaʿirah hence as representations of literary communities they reflect the social implications of literary disagreements. Arzu and Sabat were not the only writers attacking fellow poets for improper literary language and rude behavior in a mushaʿirah setting.

Mir and Yaqin

The 1740s was apparently a lively time to deride others' verse for unoriginal themse. Mir Taqi Mir's *Nikāt al-Shuʿarā* (c. 1752) is often posited as the first tazkirah chronicling a community of Urdu writers who had been active in Delhi since at least the 1720s. Mir's writing is infective and gossipy, and he does not hesitate to add his comments, warranted or not, to his peers' verse scribed into this important work of criticism and literary history. One poet stands out in particular as a target of not just Mir's scorn but other contemporaries' skepticism as well.

Inʿam Allah Khan Yaqin (1722-1755) was a celebrated poet in Delhi's thriving literary scene who was not only a talented writer, but very handsome and closely associated with the Sufi thinker and poet Mazhar Jan-i Janan (1702-1781), who was his ustad with a popular literary circle of his own. Strangely, both met untimely deaths: Yaqin was killed by his father, his body tossed in the Yamuna River, most likely for an affair he was having with another young man; Mazhar was shot by a Shiʿi Muslim during the mourning rituals for the prophet's grandson Husain ibn ʿAli (626-680) when one of Mazhar's disciples made a comment against the public religious demonstrations.

This seems to be a fate of disciples associated with Mazhar for his beloved student

Taban also died prematurely but not from violence. He drank himself to death.[55]

Mir accused Yaqin of *sarqah,* stealing newly hewn themes from his ustad

Mazhar's *dīwān.* In his entry on Mazhar Jan-i Janan, even Arzu notes that even though

he gives good instruction to he students, "some say that he writes verses to give to

them as their own" (2005: 118-9). Like Hazin's controversy with Arzu's contingent,

Yaqin's criticism may have been instigated by poor conduct in a mushaʿirah.

Writing in the 1770s, Amir al-Din Ahmad (1756-1820?) in his *Musarrat-i Afzā*

records a story from a jocular poet named Barkat Allah Qarin who one time met Yaqin's

challenge to recite a poem in a mushaʿirah "competition where poets were testing their

mettle" (*majlis-i kih maʿrikah-i tabaʿ āzmāʾī*). Yaqin stood before the group and said, "Is

there a poet today who would compose a ghazal to compete with this one and join this

manly battle?"

<div dir="rtl">
یقین تائید حق سے شعر کرے میدان کا رستم ہے

مقابل اس کرے کوئی آج آ سکتا ہے کیا قدرت
</div>

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[55] On the topic of drugs, we'll see in the next chapter that Hakim Lahori noted with a hint of disapproval on Yaqin's own opium use: "In spite of being an opium-eater, he recites good verse" (Lachhmi Narayan Shafiq Aurangabadi 1928: 163).

With the support of God, Yaqin is the Rustam in the battlefield of poetry.
Were there someone today that could compete with him! What power!

Qarin quickly rose to the task, so he tells Amir al-Din, and composed a ghazal with the

following *maltaʿ* and *maqtaʿ* that quickly won the applause of the other mushaʿirah

attendees:

مرے سینے سے تیرے عشق جا سکتا ہے کیا قدرت
کوئی لالے کے دل سے داغ اٹھا سکتا ہے کیا قدرت

یقیں گو شعر کے میدان کا رستم ہے قریں لیکن
وہ شیر حق کے شیروں سے برآ سکتا ہے کیا قدرت

What power is there that can make your love leave my heart?
Is there someone that can lift the marks from the tulip's heart? What power!

Even though Yaqin is the Rustam on the battle field of poetry, yet, oh Qarin,
What power does that worldly lion have that can prevail over God's lions?

Qarin's response to Yaqin's challenge is parallel in theme, meter, rhyme, and refrain as

we might expect for a well-timed and humorous response in a mushaʿirah.

Other poets from Mazhar Jan-i Janan's circle of students and devotees like ʿAbd

al-Haʾi Taban (1715-1749)—with whom Mazhar Jan-i Janan was probably smitten—wrote

several *tazmīn*s on verse by Yaqin, as did writers unaffiliated with Mazhar like the elder

poet Zuhur al-Din Hatim (cf. 2011: 125). Additionally, Yaqin's *dīwān* had a wide

circulation, giving evidence that he achieved fame on account of his poetic ability while

147

still in his twenties. Yaqin's popularity at the time was attested to by one tazkirah writer saying his *dīwān* could be found in any poet's home (Hakim Abu al-Qasim Mir Qudrat Allah Qasim 2002). Yaqin's particulars were covered in tazkirahs written in the south like Hamid Aurangabadi's *Gulshan-i Guftar* (c. 1752) whereas Mir Taqi Mir was not mentioned at all (1929).

In turn, the main source of rumors on Yaqin's unbalanced or inappropriate nature (*nā-mauzūnīyat*) was Mir Taqi Mir himself.[56] Yaqin was related to the famous Islamic thinker and naqshbandi reformer Ahmad al-Faruqi al-Sirhind (1564–1624) on his father's side, a man of means in his own right given that he was appointed as a nawab under Aurangzeb ʿAlamgir's reign (1658-1707). When Mir notes Yaqin owed his verse for his ustad, he casts him as a usurper of poetry, paralleling his poetic inheritance with the material wealth and cultural capital that his family held:

> Mazhar composed poems for him and transferred the inheritance of his entire *Rekhtah* corpus to Yaqin. In this regard, it's rather humorous that everything can be inherited, except poetry! But can someone actually occupy their father's poetry or their father's theme? Some would also call him false, let alone the verse of his ustad, Mazhar. (1972: 82)

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[56] For a discussion of other aspects of Mir's critique of Yaqin see Pritchett (2003).

Giving up your verse for another to claim also earned the scorn of the literary community.[57] Mus'hafi would be accused of this as well in *Āb-i Hayāt,* where Husain Azad connected him with a rumor that Mus'hafi would sell his verses to be read at mushaʿirahs and then he would collect up the scraps as his own (2006: 209). In another instance a courtesan poet complains to Amr al-Din Ahmad about losing her verse to others more famous than her. When he went to visit the said courtesan, Muhammadi Begum in Faizabad, he found her more "beautiful and witty then she had been described" (1968: 240; 1998) Ahmad's friend Wali Allah Muhibb had informed him about Muhammadi Begum, noting that she had been connected with Shujaʿ al-Daulah's commander Ismaʿel Khan's camp where she would hold lively gatherings. Ahmad was impressed by her skill at improvisation and the vast collection of famous Persian and Urdu verse she had stored in her memory. She recited a few of her poems for him including this one:

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[57] During this time period the poet Muhammad Husain Kalim wrote a long poem called *Rauzat al-Shuʿarā* (The Poets' Tomb) lampooning his Urdu-writing colleagues. About Yaqin he states,

<div dir="rtl">

یقین کے شعر پر ہیں بدگماں بعضے کہ اس کے نہیں

غلط ہے ہم نے بوجھا ہےگا مرزا جان جانان کو

</div>

About Yaqin's verse there are some rumors that it is not his.
This is a mistake for I have gone and told this to Mazhar Jan-i Janan.

149

<div dir="rtl">
قفس میں مر گئی بلبل ترستی

نہ دیکھی ہائے پھر گلشن کی بستی
</div>

> The nightingale in vein longing died in its cage,
> Alsa, it did not see the rose garden's lane again.

"No one distinguishes this poem as mine," she complained to him, "Due to being an unknown, others put their names on my verses, but I harbor no malice." When Ahmad asked Muhibb about it, he claimed not know anything about her accusation. We presume that Ahmad had heard the verse prior to visiting the courtesan poet, for he wrote, "Maybe it is from her?" (ibid.). Knowing that the verses were from a courtesan changes their tenor. Muhammadi's couplet echoes sentiments still circulated in contemporary times about the "hooker with a heart of gold" who yearns for a home life she can never have. The line could have been popular with other courtesans who circulated the verse in front of their customers.[58]

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[58] In an 1891 tazkirah out of Badaun, the writer Safa divides his subjects into poets who are *ʿūrāt -i bāzārī* or public women, clearly courtesans and prostitutes, and *ʿūrāt-i pardah nashīn* or veiled ladies (1891). The first verse under the entry of the courtesans is by a woman named Hingan Jan Achpal which seems to echo the sentiment in Muhammadi Begum's words (Safa 1891: 5).

<div dir="rtl">
ہے عیش اس کے جی کو اجی غم بہت ہے یاں

شادی وہاں رچائی ہے ماتم بہت ہے یاں
</div>

> He's having the time of his life. Sister, there is so much sadness here.
> Over there they're hosting a wedding while right here it's a funeral

It seems these verses play into the trope of what Katherine Butler Schofield notes as the "trajectory of decline and tragedy" which permeates Mughal-era sensibilities about the courtesan as a fallen woman (2012: 165).

In the contemporary musha'irah context, women are often accused of reciting their ustad's ghazals as opposed to their own. In Chapter Five below, Sauda hints at this sentiment in a poem lambasting his competitor's daughter who would apparently recite ghazals written by her father (see Appendix W from Sauda 1971: II:208-9). As we saw from before, Walih also held this view about women's poetry in general. A Persian verse could be read to illustrate this idea:

چو از روی حجابش لب فرو ماند
شنیدم من که استادش همی خواند

When she was unveiled, her lip stayed pouting.
Whatever I heard, her ustad had been reciting.

Muhammadi Begum's story, however, turns this around. Instead of a female poet reciting an ustad's compositions, Muhammadi was the ustad whose verse appeared on competitors' lips. Unfortunately, there is little information on sexually available public women like Muhammadi Begum who wrote verse and recited it for patrons and fellow courtesans alike. Like many musha'irah anecdotes, Muhammadi's brief story leaves more questions than answers. Whose lack of fame was it that made people take her poems? She does not make it clear if unknown poets would use her popular style of verse to earn a name or if Muhammadi Begum's poetry itself did not have enough

circulation in literary circles creating an opportunity for well-known literati to take her verses. Also, it's unclear who was taking her verse in the first place. Was it male poets who were doing this? Amr's friend Wali Allah Muhibb, who told him about the courtesan in the first place, almost sounds guilty when he said he knew nothing about Muhammadi Begum's conjecture.

Unlike Muhammadi Begum who seems resigned to be eclipsed by others' fame, Mir appears rather petty when covering Yaqin's particulars and supposed unoriginality. In fact it may have been Yaqin's early fame, poetic talents, and family connections that fueled Mir's jealousy, leading him to voice further rumors on Yaqin's public conduct in his *Nikāt* (c. 1752). "There is gossip to be obtained, gossip that neither you nor I, dear reader, could possibly procure," Mir writes before he launches into a personal attack on Yaqin's arrogance:

> Yaqin has such a degree of self regard that the arrogance of the Pharaoh would put the backs of its hands on the earth before him [in supplication]. After meeting him I found that he does not fully cultivate the taste of poetic understanding. Perhaps this is the very reason people hold such opinions on his inappropriateness (*gummān-i na-mauzūnīyat*); there is even a group of the view that his verse is not empty of defects. No poet could lack this degree of knowledge.

152

Mir's complaints are contradictory, something contemporary tazkirah writers also picked up on, as described in more detail below. Is it Yaqin's verse, conduct, or plagiarism that leads to Mir's kvetching? Perhaps it was Yaqin's rakish existence and opium use that turned off Mir and other members of Delhi's literary community? Nonetheless, Mir was scouring for any opening through which to make an assault on Yaqin's character, making the reader wonder if the actual reasons for Mir's gripe were more ego-driven. 1700s Delhi's literary was very competitive, and while rivalries were good-natured, animosity and jealousy crept in at times.

Mir Taqi Mir also records another example of Yaqin's arrogance in a mushaʿirah setting but this time it seems Yaqin gets his comeuppance. According to one of Mir's unnamed sources, a gathering was being held at the home of ʿAtiyat Allah Khan's home, when Yaqin, who happened to be sitting there, suddenly burst out, "Since the day that Mazhar Jan-i Janan placed the hand of his instruction on my head, he has advanced my poetry." Then, in a loud voice, someone standing before the mushaʿirah attendees recited an altered couplet from Nizami's *Sikandar Nāmah*:

شد آن مرغی کو خایهٔ زرین نهاد
حاصل او را بیضه در کلاه شکست

153

Where was that that goose that laid the golden egg?
Found it! Then I broke its egg in his hat.[59]

Mir also becomes dismissive with Yaqin over the issue of translation as imitation

or *mutabaddil,* the uncreative act of substitution which Mir finds equal to outright

plagiarism (*sarqah*). Mir states, "I have found that Urdu poets (*shāʿrān-i rekhtah*) often

substitute verse. They composed substitutions and then call it *tavārud* (inadvertent

plagiarism). It's as if the following poem by some ustad was written for them!" (1972:

84), which Mir cites:

<div dir="rtl">

هر چه گویند بی محل گویند
در توارد غزل غزل گویند

</div>

What ever they compose, they compose out of place;
they compose a ghazal plagiarized from another's plagiarized ghazal.

Here, Mir describes hack poets as simply stealing themes and ideas from poems that

were plagiarized in the first place. To claim inadvertent plagiarism is no kind of defense

in Mir's estimation, especially at a time in Delhi's 1740s when meaning and originality

were such politically contentious topics.

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[59] Nizami's original couplet reads:

<div dir="rtl">

زمانه دگرگونه آیین نهاد
شد آن مرغ کو خایه زرین نهاد

</div>

It was a changed age that produced the law.
Where was the bird that laid the golden egg.

154

While he provides no evidence for thematic congruence between Mazhar and

Yaqin's works,[60] Mir does find an instance in which Yaqin supposedly stole a theme

from a Persian verse by a poet from Arzu's generation:

کیا بدن ہوگا کہ جس کرے کھولتے جامہ کرے بند
برگ گل کی طرح ہر ناخن معطر ہوگا

What a body that must be since the knot of its opening pajamas [requires]
Every nail must be perfumed like a rose petal.

Mir finds the verse is a "word-for-word substitution" in Urdu of a Persian verse by

Anand Ram Mukhlis (d. 1750), a former disciple of Bedil who took instruction from Arzu

after Bedil died in 1720 and was one of the senior Persian poets in Delhi's literary scene.

Any of the literati would have been familiar with Mukhlis' work and Mir probably knew

the poet personally on account of his former connection with Arzu.[61] For Mir, the verse

proves that Yaqin was a talentless hack since he had indeed plagiarized the meaning

from Mukhlis' verse which reads:

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[60] However one Yaqin's defenders, Shafiq Aurangabadi does find a thematic congruence, but only proves the Shafiq's point that inadvertent plagiarism is an unavoidable hazard in being a poet.

[61] Mir notes one Urdu couplet from Mukhlis and mentions that he had died about a year before Mir was writing his tazkirah (ibid.:29).

ناخن تمام گشت معطر چو برگ گل
بند قبای کیست که وا می کنیم ما

The [Beloved's] nail was completely perfumed like a rose petal.
How could I possibly open the knot on anyone's shirt?

Plainly, the theme is the same since both poets were crafting verse on the impossibility of the Lover of ever being able to loosen the knot on the Beloved's clothes since the Lover can never have rose perfumed nails, which are really like the thorns on the rose plant itself, a metaphor reserved for the Beloved. Just as the Lover can never tug on the Beloved's clothes, he certainly won't be plucking any roses either, since even the scent of the rose is forbidden to him.

The final blow Mir lands on Yaqin concerns an instance in which another poet went to Yaqin's home to assess the accusations Mir had made about Yaqin's poetic inappropriateness (*nā-mauzūnīyat*). Shahab al-Din Saqib was a close friend of Mir's and a student of Abru, one of the more senior writers during this time. Mir and Saqib had probably met through Arzu since Mir notes that Saqib had come to Arzu's home to present his poetry at one of the ustad's musha'irah. As recounted above, Sarkhush tells us that Nasir 'Ali told him in the 1690s that the true test of the poet is to craft an imitative verse based on a more senior ustad's composition, or more succinctly, the *tarh*

156

of a ghazal tests the poet (Muhammad Qudrat Allah Gapamawi 2008: 520). Saqib tells

Mir that he went to Yaqin's house and presented a ghazal before him over which the

two of them would compose an off-the-cuff poem. After he had completed his own

ghazal, he found Yaqin unable to produce a single verse. Mir Hasan tells a similar story

where Rafiʿ Sauda and Mir Soz go to Yaqin's house to test him in a competition, yielding

the same result: Yaqin did not have a taste for poetry. Yet Mir Hasan appears a bit

perplexed by Mir and Sauda's accusations, stating, "What business is it of mine that

every shop stock reputable merchandise, since it seems his verses are toothsome and

efficacious, and his speech is not empty of piquancy" (Mir Hasan 1940: 201).

Mir Hasan was not the only poet to question the accusations of plagiarism in

Yaqin's verse. A student of Azad Bilgrami named Lachhmi Narayan Sahfiq from

Aurangabad and mushaʿirah impresario Ghulam Husain Shorish of Patna both had

critical things to say about Mir's seemingly unjust and erratic attack on Yaqin's verse.

Shorish was plainly disgusted with Mir stating, "A liar can never be a Qurʾan

reciter" (*hāfiz*) (Ghulam Husain Shorish 1984: 549). He also insults him by leveling Mir's

accusation of Yaqin back at him. "The people are saying," writes Shorish, "that he does

not know everything about the art of poetry. It has been discovered that Khan-i Arzu

157

straightened out Mir's entire *dīwān*" (ibid.: 555). Shorish then quotes a poem he had

heard:

<div dir="rtl">

ہر ورق پر ہے میر کے اصلاح

لوگ جانے ہیں سہو کاتب ہے

</div>

> On every page you'll find Mir's corrections.
> Everyone knows these were on just the scribe's errors.

Shafiq on Inadvertent Plagiarism

Shafiq Aurangabadi's criticism of Mir and defense of Yaqin reveal the social

complexity of finding new meaning in a system of bounded and heavily used metaphors

in a community of poets with similar aesthetic inclinations. Shafiq frames the debate in

the recitational terms more familiar to poets in a mushaʿirah where imitation and the

politics of new meanings generated anxiety among the speakers. The heart of Shafiq's

evidence is a collection of perfectly acceptable verses that show clear signs of

inadvertent and purposeful plagiarism. His larger point is that accusations of

plagiarism are often baseless on account of there being few "unfixed topics" (*mauzmūn-*

i na-bastah) for poets to choose from. First, he selects Persian poems and compares them

with Urdu verse that show clear thematic plagiarism and borrowing. A blatant example

158

from Mir Taqi Mir himself concerns a ghazal that was an adept translation of one of

Amir Khusrao's couplets.[62]

> I want the command to drink to be universal.
> I want the police inspector turned into a kabob.

> I make the order to drink universal.
> I turn the police inspector into kabobs.

<div dir="rtl">

عام حکم شراب می خواهم
محتسب را کباب می خواهم

عام حکم شراب کرتا ہوں
محتسب کو کباب کرتا ہوں

</div>

Shafiq then lists Urdu poets who have stolen from other Urdu poets, revealing that

even in the two decades or so that Urdu became a more widely recognized poetic

language all themes, lines, and ideas could be stolen and plagiarized with poets

remaining within the bounds of respectable literary sociability.

His most cogent and sociological explication of what originality means in the

mushaʿirah is found in a longer poem that sketches a mushaʿirah between the Lover

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[62] Shafiq does present an example from Mazhar and Yaqin, though it is one of the more tame examples of tavārud reinforcing his point that Yaqin has been unfairly targeted.

<div dir="rtl">ای باد صبا ادب ضرور است
این مشهد ماست گلسان نیست</div>

Hey spring breeze, it's necessary to have some manners
This is my Mashhad, not some garden.

<div dir="rtl">قدم سنبھال کے رکھیو ترا یہ باغ نہیں
یہ بلبلوں کا صبا مشہد مقدس ہے</div>

Zephyr, this is the nightingales' Holy Mashhad
Tread lightly, this is not your mere garden.

and the Beloved. It echoes Abu Tablib Kalim's idea that *tavārud* is a social disease,

reflecting poets' anxiety in the 1740s and 1750s about casting their own original

meanings without being castigated by their peers and losing literary standing. Shafiq's

reveals that literary vengeance is what motivates these trigger-happy poets to loose

accusations of plagiarism at each other, a sin of which they are all guilty. In this *nazm*,

Shafiq's speaker asks the same question that Walih does in his mushaʿirah with Hakim

Lahori, "who has the ability to compose poems these days with so many nitpickers

running about (*khordah chīnān*)?" We could also apply Kalim's take on *tavārud* to this

statement: "Who has the leisure to compose a verse in the present age when you have

to worry about the venereal curse of *tavārud*?" (see Appendix H).

The poem captures the anxiety of uttering a verse in a mushaʿirah, the terror

that one might have accidentally developed a theme or meaning from the one of the

masters—or worse from a contemporary.[63] The poem begins in a mushaʿirah with the

Beloved sitting down next to the Lover, lifting his veil, and uttering some hackneyed

verse bragging about his poetic accomplishment. As we saw in the competition between

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[63] Losensky writes about this when discussing Saʾib's political use of imitation in which he is very
intimate with the long-dead ustads of the past but more "ambivalent" when it comes to his "fresh-
speaking" predecessors (1998: 304).

Shaida and the *munshī* Firoz, nothing could be more banal than the theme of the

Beloved's hyacinth-scented hair.[64] So while the Beloved is allowed to utter every kind of

lyrical platitude in the musha'irah space, the Lover cannot say a thing because he is too

terrified to utter even a single verse for fear of being castigated by a misguided,

overzealous advisor or competitor. For the Lover, who is invariably a poet, *tavārud* is a

romantic disease since anyone who dares to recite any "new" or "original" verse is

most likely stealing a theme or idea.

Shafiq's *nazm* and many of the other anecdotes examined thus far show why

most gatherings would, as Mus'hafi notes, dissolve after a year or two: discord was to be

expected and perhaps encouraged when poets congregated for a musha'irah. In fact,

occasionally musha'irahs did turn violent. One of Nasir 'Ali's friends the poet Sadiq Ilqa

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[64] From Shaida:

<div dir="rtl">

زلف او را رشتهٔ جان گفتم و گشتم خجل

زانکه این معنی چو زلفش پیش پا افتاده است

</div>

> I called his tress the thread of my life and became bashful;
> Thus this particular poetic meaning, like his hair, has turned out to be banal.

Firoz's rejoinder:

<div dir="rtl">

کس نیابد معنی پیچیدهٔ زلف کجت

گرچه این معنی تو را در پیش پا افتاده

</div>

> No one can understand the complexity of yours hair's twisted meaning;
> Although, this meaning has become quite common for you.

161

was invited by Bindraban Das Khushgu to attend his regular mushaʿirah.[65] Ilqa refused

to go, saying, "If I leave my room, word will get out that Muhammad Sadiq Ilqa is

coming and my enemies will spill my blood!" (1959: 278). In 1814, one of Ghulam

Hamdani Mus'hafi's acquaintances and a student of Hyder ʿAli Atash (1778-1848) named

Mir Nasir (d. 1814) was actually killed on his way to a mushaʿirah when he got into a

duel with the local constabulary (*piyādah-hā-yi chaukī*) over a good looking young man

(*kūdakī-i hasīn*). "In the end he answered with his life from the swords' wounds," writes

Mus'hafi (1933: 337).[66] Also Mir Hasan was close with a mushaʿirah impresario named

Ahmad ʿAli Jauhar who usually wrote in Persian, but Hasan knew him for his Urdu

compositions. Jauhar hosted lively poetry gatherings going at his home and was famous

for his conversation. During one mushaʿirah a friend of Jauhar told him about a

personal conflict involving his friends that had spilled on to the streets. Hearing this,

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[65] Khushgu's gathering was a very popular event with Arzu (Kushgu 1959: 269), Shah Wali Allah (ibid.: 211), Matin (ibid.: 290), Garami (ibid.: 234), Garami's father Qabul (ibid.: 152), Urdu poet Shah Mubarak Abru (ibid.: 195) and many lesser known poets (ibid.: 312, 248, 281, 276, 256, 205-6, 150, 152) attending and recording their verses in Khushgu's diary which he kept like an autograph book.

[66] In a fitting *tazmīn* of Mir Dard quoted in Mus'hafi's entry, the unfortunate Nasir writes:

قبر ناصر سے بقول درد آتی تھی صدا
خواب تھا جو کچھ کہ دیکھا جو سنا افسانہ تھا

According to Mir Dard, this cry came from Nasir's grave:
Whatever I saw was a dream, whatever I heard was a tale.

For the original verse see Khwajah Mir Dard (2003: 133).

he went and joined the fray where two or three of his friends were killed and Jauhar himself ended losing his life too (1940: 42).

The rumors for Hazin and Arzu's falling out have to do with slights they each sustained at different mushaʿirahs—either Arzu criticized something Hazin recited or Hazin put down Arzu's verse. Similarly, Yaqin was accused of being an arrogant mushaʿirah-attendee giving Mir and others an excuse to pillory him for plagiarism. Shafiq writes a rebuttal to what he sees as pettiness in poetry and in the literary sphere itself: since all poets are infected with the disease of *tavārud* or accidental plagiarism, it's easy to sully a literary colleague's reputation. In fact, it's overdetermined in a literary community whose aesthetic thrives on imitative variation.[67]

Additionally, many of the anxieties and frustrations about meaning were the same between the *tāzah-goʾī* Persian-writing poets and the newly formalized literary sphere for Urdu or *Rekhtah* writers. In fact, the spheres were overlapping and governed by similar political and aesthetic concerns about imitation and debate. It did not matter that the corpus of Urdu was relatively small to provide for an imitative armory from

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[67] The issue of plagiarism and translation is still a contentious topic in Urdu literary circles today but in a slightly different form. As C.M. Naim and others demonstrate, Mir's differentiation between translation and writing deserves to be recognized in some cases (2013).

which writers could stock their arsenals for literary debates. The Persian canon

provided more than enough ammunition for both Persian and Urdu writers as they

each staked claims on new meanings and prepared to exercise friendly rivalries or even

occasional duels in the name of small-minded literary vigilantism as was the case with

Mir's attacks on Yaqin.[68]

In the instance of Urdu as a vernacular literary medium, one question that

stands out is how do poets create an acceptable literary style in a society with a large

cultural investment in literary sociability built around imitation? In many ways, the

mushaʿirah mediates this by providing a space for debate that allows for style, history,

and originality to be debated in the same cultural vocabulary used to express theme

and meaning in Persian and Urdu literatures. Even in the highly technical and precise

moments of debate in the mushaʿirah, the bounded lyrical universe is realized by poets'

debate and recitation.

For example, Shafiq's Beloved comes into the mushaʿirah as another poet

infected with *tavārud* and promiscuously circulates his unoriginal verse from gathering

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[68] The image of the battlefield is an abiding one for literary sociability into the 19th century. The very title of the *Khush Maʿrikah-i Zebā* by Saʿdat Khan Nasir (1971, 1972) is a good case and point for Frances Pritchett fittingly translates it as A Fine and Appropriate Martial Encounter (2003: 882).

to gathering without being castigated for it. The Lover, meanwhile, dares not utter a single line in the mushaʿirah in fear of being browbeaten for lack of originality. This paradigm holds true for the famous competitions of the 1740s for the contestants appear to be incredibly intimate with their enemies' verse. Hazin was Arzu and Sabat's Beloved in the truest sense because they deeply delved into his compositions to find instances of plagiarism and stylistics mistakes—aspects they desperately wanted to unearth. Similarly, Yaqin himself was an actual Beloved among Delhi's literary community in the 1740s and for a time more popular that Mir himself. His ustad Mazhar Jan-i Janan plainly loved him as did many others. Mir could not tolerate this and instead had to negatively attach himself to Yaqin by circulating rumors about the young poet's arrogance and unoriginality. Both accusations were unsubstantiated, but made for entertaining reading in the tazkirahs and heady gossip for the mushaʿirah circles.

Given that both Persian and Urdu language poets were so concerned with *tavārud* and its socio-literary implications, their overlap is something that deserves to be further explored. The search for new meaning leads Persophone writers to a vernacular crossroads in the mid-1700s. Arzu makes the distinction between literary

165

language as something learned, and vernacular usage as something acquired. This is an idea that informed how poets looked toward the past for imitative models through which to explore fresh themes of the future. As Arthur Dudney points out in a recent article on Zuhur al-Din Hatim's *Dīwān-zādah,* the poet edited his *dīwān* down from his two previous collections during the mid-1700s when Hatim too was well aware of the language debates going on at the time around both Persian and Urdu poetic language (Dudney 2010). For Urdu, aesthetic acceptability had to be framed by its most eloquent speakers, not poets necessarily, but by the *ahl-i zabān,* the worthies of the tongue, who employed the vernacular in everyday settings with accuracy, taste, and delight. Quoting a Persian saying, Hatim aimed to make his verse understood by the masses and enjoyed by the elite or universally enjoyed and specifically selected (*mahz rozmarrah-i kih ʿām fahm wa khās pasand būd ikhtiyār namūdah*) (2011: 106).

Yet, by the 1750s, it is apparent that contemporary Urdu writers had developed a history and aesthetic genealogy of their poetic inheritance from not just Persian but also from the *Rekhtah* writers in the first half of the 18th century. The prominent figure Wali Muhammad Wali (1667-1707) comes to mind when examining the early narratives of Urdu literature's history. In this regard, there is a striking parallels between Bedil

166

and Wali as aesthetic instigators of late *tāzah-goʾī* and early *Rekhtah* literary values

respectively. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi writes that Wali's connection to Bedil's circle was

through a previous encounter with Bedil's devotee Gulshan (d. 1728) who may have

passed through Ahmadabad while Wali was living there before settling in Delhi (2003:

845). While Wali's verse is often held up as the model for 18th-century Urdu writers, it's

Bedil who is remembered as a progenitor of *tāzah-goʾī* or "fresh-speaking" sensibilities

in Delhi's literary community during this time and in fact appears regularly in the early

Urdu tazkirahs as an Urdu or *Rekhtah* poet.

This literary and aesthetic dynamism owes it existence in part to the regular

mushaʿirahs in Bedil's house and then later at his grave which formed a geographic and

ideational polestar around which not just Persian but also Urdu language poets sought

to legitimate their aesthetic statements and literary genealogies. Had Wali indeed gone

to Delhi and visited Gulshan it would be highly unlikely that he did not meet Bedil as

well given Gulshan's association with the poet-saint and the regular mushaʿirahs Bedil

often hosted. Additionally, Qaʾim Chandpuri vaguely alludes to Bedil reading Wali's

verses, inspiring him to write his own Urdu verse (1966: 23).[69] Additionally, Qaʾim

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[69] Qaʾim may have begun writing his tazkirah before Mir Taqi Mir penned the *Nikāt*, and thus may have had access to different oral traditions around Bedil and Wali or it could just have made for a good story.

groups Bedil and Wali under the same heading which clearly shows at least a

conceptual framework that perhaps Qaʾim's group of littérateurs used to conceive of

and imagine their literary heritage.

Mir Taqi Mir, another inheritor of Bedil's cultural influence, shares an anecdote

about a contemporary poet named Muhammad Husain Kalim who is accused of stealing

Bedil's themes in the dream of his patron, Asad Yar Khan. Bedil appears before Asad Yar

Khan in the perhaps accurate and popular image we have of him: corpulent, wielding a

heavy staff, and dressed like a dervish. Bedil then implores Asad Yar Khan to tell the

poet Kalim to stop rendering his poems in Urdu and reciting them as his own (Mir

Muhammad Taqi Mir 1999). Bedil, from the grave, accuses Kalim of *sarqah* (intentional

plagiarism) the same charge Sabat leveled at Hazin and that Mir made with Yaqin. The

issue of imitation and plagiarism in the early Urdu literary sphere recasts the aesthetic

and social goals of Delhi's literary community during the 1740s and 1750s. Even Bedil

was part of this never-ending argument about how theme and meaning could be

created in Urdu. Qaʾim and Mir's use of Bedil as an aesthetic progenitor reveals how

tāzah-goʾī writers forged the literary past for Urdu poets during this time period

insomuch as the earliest Urdu poets were intimately connected with "fresh-speaking"

sensibilities. While they read the Persian poets closely and Persian was the artistic and bureaucratic language of the time, they also took on the social institutions that propagated *tāzah-goʾī* literary aesthetics.

As discussed in the first chapter, the recitational space does not allow for poets to write too far into the past. There was imitation of ancients, but as we saw above, Persian and Urdu poets were more often engaged in imitating poets from the recent past, often the generation that had come before. These would be poets some of them grew up with and met in their earliest mushaʿirahs. Significantly, Wali himself was interested in aligning himself with Mughal- and Safavid-era Persian language poets. As Shamsur Rahman Faruqi points out, with the exception of one poet, Hasan Shauqi, all the poets Wali names through wordplay, praise, or boasts are Persian writers, even though Urdu, or some form of it, had been a nascent literary language in the south where Wali was from (2001: 140).[70] What Faruqi does not mention is that roughly sixty percent of the poets listed in Wali's wordplays are *tāzah-goʾī* writers: the "moderns" whose work preceded Wali's artistic output by not more than a generation or two. At

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[70] Wali's verses about Persian writers need to be examined further. Additionally, writers such as Payam, Fitrat, ʿAta, and Faqir were significant liminal characters between Urdu and Persian writing circles who were regulars in the mushaʿirah scene in Delhi and elsewhere.

the end of a panegyric, he writes a *tazmīn* on a *qasīdah* verse from the early Mughal poet

ʿUrfi Shirazi (d. 1592). Not only does it show Wali's connections to the *tāzah-goʾī* writers

in general, but it presents a productive concept to understand Persophone textual

practices in which the diary, tucked under one's arm and closer to the heart, is dearer

than a *dīwān*:

<div dir="rtl">

لگیا ہے دل کوں ولی کرے یہ مصرع عرفی

کہ این قصیدہ بیاضی بود نہ دیوانی

</div>

> This line from ʿUrfi has delighted Wali's heart,[71]
> For this *qasīdah* was worth noting down in a diary, not a *dīwān*.[72] (1982: 412)

Wali quoted the line because he was highlighting the idea that a line of verse jotted

down in a diary or *bayāz* was sweeter or more poignant to the listener because he took

the time to record it to be carried around. The line implies that for a verse or poem to

be *bayāzī* it has to embody a level of subjective meaningfulness which makes it unique

for a diarist to capture. This idea will be developed further below.

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[71] ʿUrfi's first line reads:

For ages, the sky, looking at the diary and reading, wrote this: زمانہ خواندہ فلک بر بیاض دیدہ نوشت

[72] Mir Taqi Mir also has a verse that references the sociability of the diary:

<div dir="rtl">

سیر کی رنگین بیاض باغ کی ہم نے بہت

سرو کا مصرع کہاں وہ قامت موزوں کہاں

</div>

I took long strolls through the white pages of the blooming garden's diary.
Now where is that cypress-straight verse, that one with the perfectly symmetrical figure?

While meet ʿUrfi would have been an impossibility, Wali could have met the

"fresh-speaking" poets Nasir ʿAli, Fitrat, or even Saʾib. All were poets with whose

writing Wali was familiar—at least he makes appear as such since he cites these exact

names in his poems. Of them all, Nasir ʿAli would have been most likely to have crossed

paths with Wali as he was patronized in the south for some time. Muhammad Husain

Azad records a line from Wali's *dīwān* where he praises the *tāzah-goʾī* writer (Azad 57):

اچھل کر جا پڑے جوں مصرع برق
اگر مطلع لکھوں ناصر علی کوں

> Hopping up, he would take off like a lightening bolt verse
> If I would write this *matlaʿ* to Nasir ʿAli[73]

Also, if the legends about Gulshan and Wali are true, it would be unimaginable for this

foundational Urdu writer not to have met Bedil while visiting Delhi who at this time

was at the height of his fame and running lively mushaʿirahs. While Faruqi ascribes

Urdu (actually *Hindī/Rekhtah*) becoming a cosmopolitan language to Wali alone, I find

Wali and his verse symbolizing a larger social process as many poets searched for new

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[73] Faruqi discusses this line (2003: 846). It appears Husain Azad edited the verse from Wali's *dīwān* which
reads:
پڑے سن کر اچھل جیوں مصرع برق

> Hearing this lightening bolt of a verse thus would he jump up (ibid.: 215)

He also records a response that popular literary lore assigned to Nasir ʿAli upon hearing this prophetic
line, but as he states, it was most likely written as an imagined response to Wali's line by the poet Aziz
Dakani:

باعجاز سخن گر اوڑ چلے وہ
ولی ہر گز نہ پہنچے گا علی کوں

> It would be a literary miracle were he to soar that high
> Wali, a mere "saint," will never reach the station of an ʿAli.

171

meanings and novel ways to recast the topics of Persophone lyrical expression. Wali is

seductive since so little is known about him. Like Amir Khusrao, who often becomes the

the inventor of all kinds of musical traditions and instruments, Wali too becomes the

master symbol upon which many literary devices and aesthetic paradigms are pinned.

To close this section, Shafiq Aurangabadi relates a humorous anecdote

chronicling a discussion about Wali. He heard the story going around his community of

poets, and while the story's teller is respectable, he does not give his name:

> Some of the south's famous poets were sitting, drinking, and having a good time next to a river. As night began to fall and they got more lively, the story teller, who was standing off to the side, noticed one poet in particular who was tremendously inebriated starting to let all kinds of foul things slip off his tongue.
> "Wali was but a child!" the drunk poet yelled, "What drivel he composed that people go on praising! I, on the other hand, am one who appreciates a delicate metaphor and enthralling utterance, all of which I have entered into my own verse. If Wali was here today I would slap his face black and blue until he would drop all his claims to fine rhetoric (*rangīn bayānī*). Fine, bring his *dīwān* so that I can sink it in the water!" At that moment a servant, following his orders, brought the *dīwān*, and the drunk poet sent the whole thing page by page sailing into the river.
> The next morning, when he awoke and the effects of drinking from the night before began to pass, he called for his own *dīwān* that he himself had edited before having it beautifully scribed and lined with gold leaf. But it could not be found for the night before he had mistakenly sent each page of it floating down the river and Wali's works were still safe.

As Shafiq says, "It's truth or falsehood falls on the narrator's head" (156).

2.3 Putting Persian in a Chest

بی چراغ است اگر بزم خیالم غم نیست
مصرع ریخته شمعی است که در عالم نیست

If the gathering of my imagination has no flame, it's no problem;
For a *rekhtah* line is a candle that is not of this world.

Ghani Kashmiri (d. 1666)[74]

So who were all these misguided poets falsely praising Wali? The Urdu language poet Zuhur al-din Hatim praised both Wali and Saʾib and was also very particular about other poets upon whose verse he wrote imitative variations.[75] As C.M. Naim notes, Hatim's earliest mushaʿirah-based ghazal noted in the *Dīwān-zādah* is from 1719 (Naim 2004:181). In turn, this edited *dīwān* can be read as a kind of a reverse tazkirah that

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[74] The line mentioned above deserves some explanation. Ghani Kashmiri was not referring to a verse in *Rekhtah* the language we know today as Urdu. A *rekhtah* line (*misraʿ-i rekhtah*) according to the poet and lexicographer Anand Ram Mukhlis is an "unaffected and uncontrived verse of poetry (*be-takalluf wa be-sākhtah*), and hence there is none of the pretext and dithering (*taqdīm wa taʾkhīr*) from the ability to craft verse (*mauzūnīyat*) to interfere with it" (Mukhlis 2013: 657). Shamsur Rahman Faruqi and others have discussed the origins of Urdu language's name looking at Delhi's urban environment and its many names as imperial center or *urdū-i muʿallā*. Citing Arzu's writing, he notes the *urdū* in mid-1700s Mughal India was the urbane cosmopolis of Persian speakers. It was an ironic and rakish way of calling the large Mughal city a camp, as in traveling capital of the Turkic peoples, what was called the *urdū-i gihānpā* or the "globe trotting camp." When Shah Jahan built the new walled city between 1638-1649, his camp took root as the "high camp" (*urdū-i muʿallā-yi Shāhjahānābād*). With this in mind, the name *urdū* appears more centralized compared to the language's earlier names. During the mid-1700s and before, the Persianized vernacular was given the infectious nickname of *Rekhtah* perhaps to acknowledge the concept Mukhlis explains.

[75] In a Persian verse Hatim calls Wali his ustad in Rekhtah and Saʾib his teacher in Persian. In another couplet Hatim goes so far to call Wali the "Parrot of India," a titled usually reserved for Amir Khusrao. Saʾib becomes the "Nightingale of Tabriz" where he was in fact originally from (Hatim 2011: 22).

173

memorializes verse itself and only implicitly records the composer's particulars. Traditional tazkirahs appear to work the other way around by focusing on the details of a host of personalities while recording their verse at a particular moment in time.

In the latter half of the 1700s, as Urdu's popularity rose among the literary elite, the mushaʿirah as a historiographic and imitative space became more regularly documented in tazkirahs written outside of Delhi. Tazkirah writing in Urdu literary circles began during Delhi's contentious 1740s in the context of the many theoretical battles that erupted, the hosting of regular mushaʿirahs, and the yearly ʿurs mushaʿirah at the grave of ʿAbd al-Qadir Bedil (d. 1720). Between 1752 and 1755, Urdu poets completed six well-known tazkirahs that chronicled some of the literary culture and local poets' verse in Delhi, Patna, and Aurangabad showing that in the thirty years since Wali's *dīwān* made waves in Delhi's literary community, Urdu as a Persophone vernacular was already taking on cosmopolitan trappings. That is not say that Urdu literary culture was not being patronized in other cities prior to 1720s, or that there were no mushaʿirahs during that time; more writers with a variety backgrounds and interests were documenting the literary culture in Delhi over the 1740s. Luckily they captured some of the mushaʿirah scene.

174

Hatim's Son of a Dīwān

As we've been discussing the importance of imitative paradigms in Persophone

literature, it's important to keep in mind what this meant for Urdu poets attempting to

bring linguistic legitimacy to their craft while maintaining the Persophone genealogy

with which they were well familiar. Arthur Dudney's work on Arzu and Hatim's edited

dīwān reveals that Urdu writers and Persian theorists like Arzu sought to create

linguistic legitimacy through appealing to the *ahl-i zabān* or the worthy speakers

(Dudney 2010). This term itself is used in different contexts to refer to the cultural

legitimacy among different groups of speakers who use idioms and turns of phrase

deemed socially and aesthetically acceptable by the wider community, notably those

who consider themselves *ahl-i zabān.*

Appealing to the speakers as opposed to the ancestors is an important

distinction that needs to be made when examining imitation in the mushaᶜirah Urdu

language setting. In Hatim and Arzu's projects there was a social element that revealed

the publicness of their enterprises. Hatim himself states in the preface to the *Dīwān-*

zādah that he sought to merely make his verse adapt to the day-to-day speech patterns

that were both universally understood and specially chosen (*mahz rozmarrah-i ᶜām fahm*

wa khās pasand būd ikhtiyār nimūdah). As first stated in the introduction, Rajeev Kinra invokes a similar saying in regard to his ideas of Mughal publicness, that not only language but the public institutions of Mughal society in general, namely in the market, must adhere to this larger idea of *ʿām fahm wa khās pasand* (2008: 208-11).[76] Since there was not a long chain of Urdu ancestors upon which could writers chart legitimacy, appealing to the masters of the past was an impossibility or could at best performed through macaronic *tazmīns* and boasts as Wali's verses above illustrated. Instead the contemporary and near past community became the Urdu mushaʿirah's immediate focus for legitimating the linguistic and aesthetic realms.

Interestingly, the literary historical frame had a formal impact on the way mushaʿirahs were conducted over the 18th century. Since the beginning of the 1700s, Urdu poet documented their use of imitative paradigms to develop literary abilities. Zuhur al-Din Hatim's *Dīwān-zādah* gives ample evidence of the intricacies of literary sociability by listing verses as *tarhī*, *javābī* or *farmāʾishī* (modeled, responsive, or requested) plus their year of composition and to whom he was responding and on

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[76] Both Kinra and Dudney have different ways of translating this. Both allude to the phrase referring to something like "understood by the common and enjoyed by the elite," focusing on the class distinctions the phrase implies in the extremely hierarchical Mughal setting. My translation inflects more of my communicative interest in lyricism and the mushaʿirah's public form of literary sociability.

whose orders he was composing. In the case of Hatim's answering or *javābī* verses , the

list of interlocutors' names is extensive, but Wali was only the second most cited poet

in eleven instances. Rafiᶜ Sauda was the first with twelve citations. Additionally, several

of Hatim's Urdu verses were macaronic imitations of the deceased *tāzah-goʾī* writer

Saʾib, the poet he claims as his deferred teacher (ibid.: 321). Hatim also lists

contemporary *tāzah-goʾī* writers such as Rasikh, Arzu, and his ustad ᶜAndalib (Mir Dard's

saintly father). In this regard, not only was Hatim legitimating his linguistic heritage,

but he was also certifying his aesthetic genealogy by marking which ghazals and under

what circumstances they were being recited. The *Dīwān-zādah* uniquely records at a

formal level how Hatim composed verse within the social setting of Delhi's literary

sphere. Specifically, the verses alluded to mushaᶜirahs that were organized around a

misraᶜ-i tarh and depicted a glimpse of the formal guidelines under which Hatim and his

colleagues were reciting together.

In one instance, Hatim and his contemporary Mubarak Abru (1692-1748) became

ham-tarh or stylistically matched in an instance that appears particularly "recitational,"

following what Frances Pritchett calls "mushaᶜirah" verse. At a mushaᶜirah from some

time in 1722 or 1723 Abru recited:

اب روبرو ہے یار نہیں بولتا سو کیوں

قصے وہ آبرو کے بنانے کدھر گئے

Now that he is face-to-face, so why was the Beloved dumbfounded?
Now where did he go so spin those tales about Abru? (1990: 259)

Hatim probably composed this response in a mushaʿirah, face-to-face with Abru. The

first and last couplets are sampled below:

اس دکھ میں ہائے یار یگانے کدھر گئے

سب چھوڑ ہم کو غم میں نہ جانے کدھر گئے

۔۔۔

حاتم کرے دل کو مصرع اول نے خوں کیا

اس دکھ میں ہائے یار یگانے کدھر گئے

Oh incomparable Beloved, where did you go so annoyed?
"After everyone left me stricken, Lord knows where all I went!"
...
Since the first line has the blood of Hatim's heart on its hands,[77]
Oh singular Beloved, where did you go in such a state? (2011: 351)

There are several clues that lead me to believe the ghazals were actually recited in a

mushaʿirah and penned to each other in a "deferred gathering." The most obvious tip is

that Hatim himself tells us that this is a *javābī* verse written in Abru's form or *zamīn*.

From this statement, it should not be assumed that is was recited even though we know

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[77] I thank Syed Akbar Hyder for suggesting the translation that "the line" had the blood of the heart on its hands.

178

this era's main route of literary circulation was oral. Our second sign of the verse's

mushairah setting is in the structure of the verse itself. As noted in the introduction to

this project, tazkirahs implicitly record mushaʿirah verse that references its own

recitation. Hatim's ending couplet is an example of this.

Hatim was playfully displaying his compositional abilities for the delight of his

presumed mushaʿirah audience. Since the final couplet references the poet's pen name,

there is no better place in a mushaʿirah verse to create an instance of internal poetic

and semantic reference. The first line murdered Hatim's heart, so he tells us in a

boasting and exaggerated manner. The listeners then wonders, "What was that first line

again?" In the recitational space where people wrote down verse and memorized it at a

moment's notice, anyone in the audience could probably have recalled it; and when

Hatim uttered the first line of his final couplet, it would be easy to imagine his audience

calling the line back to him. This type of playful panache and word play is a welcomed

and delightful feature in the mushaʿirah context. In short, the verses were *bayāzī* or

worth noting in a diary, to quote ʿUrfi and Wali's verse from above.

The Diary

As an artifact that has been "specially edited for everyone's enjoyment," *Dīwān-zādah* illustrates a productive link between textual practices of the era and forms of publicness and sociability. The *Dīwān-zādah* shows a *bayāz* element in the way Hatim carefully noted his compositions' context, a feature usually only seen in tazkirahs, textual genres we know have a *bayāz*-sublayer given that they themselves were crafted from poets' scribbles. It is conceivable that Hatim took out his old diaries when crafting the *Dīwān-zādah* and added the commentary on each ghazal's context. In short, it reads like a tazkirah of one. It reverses the intent of tazkirah writing by explicitly pointing to the *bayāz* as the originating textual source, something usually only implied in the final edit of a conventional *dīwān* or tazkirah. Hatim's acknowledging his diary in the *Son of a Dīwān,* elucidates the textual and material strands linking the literary and social settings which are in turn worth exploring here.

Notably, the *Dīwān-zādah* defines the 18th-century idea of being *ham-tarh* or mutually based. Hatim and Abru's verses above show the social, aesthetic, and material practices poets used to instantiate their verse within a society of listeners and reciters. They reveal a social connection between Hatim and Abru in that they both composed

180

according to this meter, rhyme, and refrain, rendering them stylistically connected or *ham-tarh*. According to the writing conventions of the time, the two men, not the verses per se, were *ham-tarh*. The means of achieving this was through the mutual exchange of a species of verse that historians of 19th-century Urdu culture call *ham-tarh* or *ham-zamīn* lines. However, in no period tazkirah from before 1810 I have seen writers refer to verse as *ham-tarh*. It was only a quality cultivated between two poets. Aesthetically, since Hatim's verse is self-referential, the poetic language mirrors the delight of the mushaʿirah space; the verse poetically represents a mushaʿirah since it adheres to the infinite loop of referents illustrated in Khushgu's verse in this project's introduction where the listener has no indexical ground to stand upon.[78]

Hatim's *Dīwān-zādah* was not unique in its literary intentions; it was only peculiar in the way it revealed the textual, social, and aesthetic connections implicit in all literary and historiographic enterprises during the 1700s whether they were *dīwāns* or tazkirahs. That is, Hatim shows us how writing, recitation, and sociability were *bayāzī* — use ʿUrfi and Wali's development of the term from above. Hatim's *Dīwān-zādah* simply

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[78] A pun has to made here since it serves the theoretical point I am trying to make about the materiality of verse. In self-referential couplets, the reader or listener has no semantic ground on which to stand. Instead, they only have the poetic ground or *zamīn*.

proves that the literary historian can read these sources in a more unified manner than previously imagined. As a historical document, the tazkirah's intentions were circumscribed by the conventions and concerns of a particular poetic community. However, the historian can read them in a more lyrical fashion to extrapolate the bounded yet productive contexts of their creation. To quote Dudney, "When used correctly, namely by tuning our interpretation to the rhetoric of representing a community of poets, they can tell us a great deal" (2013: 39).

I would like to expand Dudney's point here. When examined as textual artifacts, tazkirahs reveal the material practices that went into maintaining the communities of poets they document. Works like Hatim's *Son of a Dīwān* allow for a material interpretation of literary practices because they so clearly show the textual practices that were employed to craft them. At the material level, the edited nature of his *Dīwān-zādah* parallels the immediacy of the diary when Hatim composed a given verse or jotted it down after he recited it in a mushairah. While we know that tazkirahs and *dīwāns* are based on *buyuz* or diaries, historians and literary critics have not connected these textual practices with the late-Mughal public sphere. The *bayāz* is an important material and literary focal point which informed communities and distributed style. In

182

a personal communication, Paul Losensky draws out the material and sociable

processes engendered by Saʾib's diary, an archived and widely circulated diary:

> First, Saʾib's *bayāz* did circulate. Three manuscripts have been identified, one
> each in Hyderabad (India), Tehran, and Isfahan. This is speculation, but the work
> seems to have been put together in Saʾib's home scriptorium and then copied
> and carried off by his many students. In short, Saʾib's *bayāz* is real, got around to
> poets in both Iran and India, and is a substantial, though idiosyncratic survey of
> the history of Persian poetry up through the 17th century. (Personal
> Communication; see Losensky 2007)

Arzu, among others, relied upon Saʾib's *bayāz* while composing the *Majmaʿ-i Nafāʾis* over the

1730s though he does not cite how he got a copy of this work. Losensky essentially sketches a

material history for Saʾib's *bayāz's* that the tazkirah record in fact confirms. By this logic, the

diary becomes a material representation of the social and aesthetic processes that went into

forming literary communities during early modern times in Safavid and Mughal lands.

Losensky's material interpretation the Indo-Persian diary also highlights the

socio-literary idea circulated in ʿUrfi and Wali verse about a verse being *bayāzī* or

worthy of a diary. If his theory is true, Saʾib's students plainly cherished their teacher's

dairy to have it copied, bound, and circulated among their literary circles and beyond.

Reproducing Saʾib's diary became a way to represent and broadcast the writer's own

ideals on what he considered *bayāzī* or dear to his heart and worth noting down in a

183

diary. By focusing additional attention on the material trajectories behind Indo-Persian

modes of textual practice, we find a more unified literary epistemology for tazkirah

writing at the aesthetic, structural, and social levels. In turn, this enables the historian

to look deeper into tazkirahs and *dīwāns* from the 1700s through wide methodological

approach so as to unearth the social nuances of Persophone literary sociability.

2.4 Urdu Mushaʿirahs in Delhi's late 1700s

Hatim had his hands in several poetry circles over his long life and took on many

students. In the late 1760s he sat along the Yamuna in the residence of the Sufi saint

Taslim Shah not very far from the *Zīnat al-Masājid*. In a gathering first recorded by

Rangin himself in his *Majālis-i Rangīn*—another fascinating work which could be read as

a tazkirah of one—and reproduced in a word for word translation in Muhammad

Hussain Azad's *Āb-i Hayāt*, we learn that in his youth Rangin and several of his friends

including Muhammad Aman Nisar would visit with Shah Hatim at Taslim's hermitage.

Once when Rangin got the courage to recite something, another mushaʿirah attendee

chastised him for being too bold in front of a senior poet. But Hatim encouraged Rangin

and exclaimed in Hindi, "A promising sapling has glossy leaves indeed!" (*honhār bīrve ke*

184

chikne chikne pāt) before reciting these lines in Persian in response to reprimand the

overly decorous attendee:

$$من و آن ساده دل که عیب مرا$$
$$همچو آئینه روبرو گوید$$
$$نه چو شانه بصد زبان و دو رو$$
$$پس سر رفته مو بمو گوید$$

> Me and that simple heart which is a fault of mine.
> "It's like a mirror," he says my face [and taking my heart]
> "No, it's like a comb with one hundred tongues and two faces,"
> He says while going over each hair.
> (Saʿdat Yar Khan Rangin 1990: 4-5)

According to Mus'hafi, Mir would often call Hatim the "nursemaid to the poets" (*dāh al-shuaʿrā*) in gatherings (1985a: 81). Given Hatim and Arzu's overlapping interest in the

vernacular definition of literary sociability, it would seem that their positions as

literary impresarios were also parallel. That is, Arzu too seemed to be a "nursemaid" to

the poets.

In addition to hosting Persian literary gatherings, Arzu was also famous for the

Urdu mushaʿirahs he would organize that several tazkirahs writers attest to attending.

Mir Taqi Mir was at many of these sessions, as were Mir Hasan and Sauda. Hakim Lahori

and ʿUzlat came to Arzu's house while they were both in Delhi. In fact, they met there

on several occasions, as they both note. Strangely, there is little documentary evidence

185

of the mushaʿirahs actually happening, that is we do not have anecdotes from the gatherings, but we do have some of their verse. In the context of Bedil's graveside mushaʿirahs, the chronicler and poet Bindraban Das Khushgu notes an instance, in verse, where he defended himself again the attacks of another poet named Akhtar in front of the poets Garbakhsh Huzur, Hakim Chand Nudrat, Maʿni Yab Khan, and Arzu himself while they were all gathered at Arzu's home for a mushaʿirah (see Chapter Five). This is significant point in this section because Arzu actually inherited many of Bedil's students when the poet-saint died. With this, Arzu also took on the social circles Bedil had cultivated since coming to Delhi in 1690. As elaborated in the last chapter, Arzu's patronage of the ʿurs mushaʿirah and his own gatherings helped to legitimate his inherited position as the scion of tāzah-goʾi sociability.

There are no anecdotes on Urdu verse in Arzu's gatherings, but there is a hint of one as seen in Mir Hasan and Mir Taqi Mir's tazkirahs. These two work were written within about ten years of each other, covering some of the same anecdotes, verse, and personalities of Delhi's literary scene over the 1740s and 1750s. Our evidence of Urdu verse recited in one of Arzu's gatherings are in three parallel verse examples between the two tazkirahs.

186

Mir's impression of Delhi's literary scene is well reflected in his compendium

Nikāt al-Shuʿarā in which he chronicles a few mushaʿirah personalities. It seems Urdu

verse writing was becoming so stylish among the literati that they took to calling their

gatherings *murākhtah-hā* or gatherings for the exchange of *Rekhtah*. Mir explains it best:

"this is the word that people created according to the form of the word

mushaʿirah" (1972: 140). The fact that Mir needs to explain the word's meaning for his

audience, which is presumed to be his fellow poets, makes the word *murākhtah* to

appear as just a stylishness neologism. The word never caught on. While others cite the

word, in the dozens if not hundreds of tazkirahs written since, writers consistently use

the word "mushaʿirah."

Mir brings up this concept of the *murākhtah* in the context of Miyan Kamtarin

about whom he states:

> He's a man with a nonchalant temperament and has a strong tendency towards
> writing dirty jokes. Accordingly, he boasts of his own talent. I myself have not
> heard a reasonable poem from him [but] sometimes at *murākhtah* gatherings we
> run into each other. (1972: 140)

Kamtarin seems to have been one of these mushaʿirah personalities writing interesting

public poetry during the 1740s, but whose personality passed beyond the bounds of

what Mir considered acceptable decorum. One of his students, ʿAjiz, was a regular

attendee at the poet Hafiz Halim's gatherings, a Persian poet who wrote in the style of

Abu Ishaq, the patron and friend of Hafiz Shirazi who was eventually beheaded in 1353

in front of the ruin of Persepolis.

Beyond his attendance at Halim's gatherings, little is known about ʿAjiz.

Marginalia from a copy of Mir's tazkirah list him as a Hindu, but in the published text

Mir says that he a *lūtī* or catamite, and besides being a student of Kamtarin, ʿAjiz weaves

nonsense and doggerel into his compositions.[79] While Mir keeps some connection with

ʿAjiz's ustad, he states he has no connection or intercourse with the poet himself. This I

find hard to believe because he records one of ʿAjiz's verses:

دل بعل مارے لئے جاتے ہیں یہ سب مکتب کرے طفل
شیخ سعدی تم بھی اب لے کر گلستان دوڑیو

Taking my heart under their arms all these schoolboys go by.
Oh Sheikh Saʿdi, you too should take the *Gulistān* and go running after them.
(Mir 1972: 143; Mir Hasan 1940: 107).

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[79] *Lūtī* is curious word and not the only time Mir uses it in his tazkirah. The word literally means catamite, but given ʿAjiz's public and jovial nature and the fact that Mir Hasan also alludes to Mir himself being a catamite, we should not necessarily take the word's literal meaning in this in instance. Syed Akbar Hyder pointed this out in a personal communication that this could just be an example of the literary sphere's humor where calling someone a *lūtī* was simply an expected insult in light of sex between men being something socially frowned upon, but by no means illegal. It was simply funny to accuse someone of "taking it" from another man especially when they may have crossed some other social barrier with a joke or poem said in poor taste. In modern Persian, *lūt* or *lūtī* connotes someone with a generous, nonchalant, and rakish attitude; Dehkhuda evens supplies the work *bānkā* from Urdu in his definition to illustrate the modern sense.

The verse captures the image of the *kaj kulāh,* the beautiful Beloved young man or *amrad*, who is just leaving the school with a copy of Sa'di's *Gulistan* under his arm. The *Gulistan* remains to this day a standard textbook on morality and ethics for Muslim religious education. The Lover imagines his heart tucked under the arm of this beautiful young boy instead. The next line has a subtle *īhām* or double entendre with Sheikh Sa'di's name. The term *'illat-i mashā'ikh* refers to the curse or disease of the religious leaders who were surrounded by these young boys—*mashā'ikh* is the plural of sheikh.[80] Since Sa'di is also a sheikh, the verse implies that he too is a dirty old man suffering from the *'illat-i mashā'ikh.* Though Mir has little good to say about 'Ajiz's personality, he was obviously struck by his verse, which he may have heard in a gathering at Arzu's home.[81]

Mir Hasan was another tazkirah writer and poet active during the 1740s though he would not complete his compendium until 1774-5 and kept updating it until the

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[80] See the anecdote on Sa'ib employing this term at the end of Chapter One.

[81] Mir is famous for some of his verses commenting on the *'illat-i mashā'ikh* indirectly:

بزار شانہ و مسواک و غسل شیخ کرے
بمارے عندیے میں تو وہ بے خبیث پلیت

Let the preacher do his combing and tooth-brushing and washing a thousand times
In my humble opinion, though, he's actually a nasty bugger.

1780s. With several of his companions, Mir Hasan attended Arzu's gatherings when Mir was also there. One of these companions was the writer Abu al-Hasan Wahshat (c. 1740s). He was a student of Sauda and died while a young man. Beyond this, there is little known about who he was, but he did write this verse:

قاتل اگر کہے کہ سسکتا ہے چھوڑیو
خنجر تو ایک دم کرے لئے منہ نہ موڑیو

If the killer shall say, "Oh you're sobbing. Never mind,"
Then don't take your eye off the dagger for a second.[82]
(Mir Hasan 1940: 182; Mir 1972: 133)

In this verse, the Beloved appears as a surgeon or *nāsih* wielding a knife that makes the Lover quiver in fear since his death is inevitable. The Beloved, undeterred, simply tells his prey to "look away" while the killing is done. Mir in his *Nikāt* mistakenly credits this verse to Mir Hasan. It is an understandable mistake as I explain below.

ʿAjiz and Wahshat composed parallel poems. These two poets were stylistically linked in verse at the formal level, what we now know tazkirah writers in the 1700s referred to as *ham-tarh*. For the Urdu speaker, this is apparent in the ending rhyme or *qāfiyah: -orīyo.* This is a significant ending since the verb contains a retroflex "r" which is thought to be a difficult letter to use when composing rhymed verses. However, the

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190

verbal construction is a singular command form which makes it easier to construe a

verb with a retroflex "r." Yet, the meter also restricts poets' options. The "long-short-

short" pattern in a word like *morīyo* narrows poets' choices to verbal stems with a long

syllable ending in the retroflex "r"—as *mor*, *chhor,* and *dor* all do. Plainly, these verses

were based off of a sample line given in the mushaʿirah, but now lost us, over which the

poets were exercising their skills.

All the formal elements aside, both poems display novel uses of theme and

meaning that play with lyrical intent. They would be undoubtedly memorable to the

poets in attendance even if they misremembered who recited them. Mir mistakenly

attributed this verse to Mir Hasan because they were both present in the same

mushaʿirah where the verses were recited. Additionally, it had perhaps taken place at

Arzu's home given that we know Mir was living there in the early 1740s before he and

his uncle had a disagreement. Mir Hasan attended the gatherings and so did Wahshat as

Mir Hasan himself tells us (1940: 182). There is no confirmation that ʿAjiz was there but

we know he was a regular mushaʿirah personality on account of his connection with his

jovial teacher Kamtarin. Mir's *Nikāt al-Shuʿarā* was hurriedly written and, in addition to

his exaggerations and character assassinations, there are several mistakes and falsehoods.

With regard to Mir's falsehoods, the poet did have a cursory connection to ʿAjiz which was instantiated through a mushaʿirah, the most widespread and common form of literary sociability in Delhi. The coterie of Persophone literati composing in Urdu during Delhi's 1740s was still fairly small, so it would be difficult to imagine Mir not running into this particular poet. Mir was most likely reflecting gossip that he had heard in the bazaar and used ʿAjiz's delightful verse which plainly displays homoerotic inclinations to castigate or poke fun at ʿAjiz by hinting at this parallel.

Mir mistakenly attributed the verse to Mir Hasan in an understandable slip since Mir probably heard the verse, jotted it down in his *bayāz* or memorized it on the spot, and then hurriedly recorded later it in his tazkirah (1971: 133). He remembered Mir Hasan was there and mistakenly gave it to him since there is no record of a Wahshat in Mir's tazkirah. It's conceivable that Mir did not want to give credit to Wahshat, but since there are no reports of Wahshat being "unbalanced" by mushaʿirah standards, that is he did not violate norms on decorum, there is little reason to believe Mir wanted to sideline his colleague. Mir just forgot who he was.

In short, the parallel verses tell a different story than the one Mir wants us to believe. Instead they are evidence of the society of listeners and reciters structured by literature's formal attributes. Additionally, these parallel lines are evidence of the textual practices poets use to distill, remember, record, and circulate delightful and meaningful verse as worthy of noting down in a diary. Both Mir Hasan and Mir Taqi were clearly relying on some kind of association or trace to trigger their memories when writing their compendiums. The mnemonic devise was either a diary or the rhymed and thematic associations engendered by the very structure of the verses' formal properties and the context of their sociability. For the historian attempting to understand 1700s literary sociability that thrived off of the exchange and circulation of verse, they give ample evidence of the day-to-day intricacies of the mushaʿirah's sociolinguistic logic. While it's by no means definite, these verses may show us what sorts of literary experiments were happening in Arzu's workshop in which he hosted many of the city's visiting and local Persophone literati.

Over the 1740s, many other poets came to Delhi specifically to meet with the intellectual elite of the Persophone literary world's capital. Some came explicitly for the literary sociability which they knew could be found in excess given that gatherings

did not stop in spite of Nadir Shah's 1739 attack. Mir Taqi Mir and the Persian language poet, musician, and emigre from Isfahan Ummid Qizilbash Khan (d. 1746), whom we will discuss in Chapter Four, are examples of two poets who came to Delhi in the wake of Nadir Shah's destruction and actively took part in Delhi's literary sphere. They also knew each other somewhat, meeting at mushaʿirahs and other public events in the city. For instance, once Mir ran into Ummid at an ʿurs where he called out to Mir and recited some of the Urdu verses he had been composing of late. Interestingly, we learn of Ummid's connection to the Urdu poets Sauda, Firaq, Pakbaz, Khaksar, and Qaʾim as well through a particular mushaʿirah organized around this particular *tarh*: *-ād kartā hai.*

One poet named Salah al-Din Pakbaz (c. 1740s), hosted regular events in which popular devotional singers or *qawwāls* would perform. In fact, Pakbaz even fell in love with one of these professional singers (see Chapter Four). The tazkirah writer and poet Qaʾim al-Din Qaʾim Chandpuri (1722-1793/4) often visited Pakbaz's Friday gatherings and Pakbaz would come to Mir Taqi Mir's famous mushaʿirah inherited from Mir Dard held on the 15th of every month. Qizilbash Khan Ummid met Pakbaz at a mushaʿirah one time and told the tazkirah writer Ali al-Husaini Gardezi that he heard Pakbaz recite this poem at the gathering in question:

قفس کے در کو باز اے بلبل اب صیاد کرتا ہے

خدا جانے کرے گا ذبح یا آزاد کرتا ہے

The cages door, oh nightingale, does the hunter open the door.
God knows will what he will do, does he slaughter or release it?
(1995: 58)

To further complicate the social context, Qaʾim, Rafiʿ Sauda, and Murtaza Quli Firaq, an

employee of the Royal Armory who composed Persian and Urdu, were all good friends

who regularly got together for poetry exchange. For instance, Firaq hosted Sauda and

the poet Khaksar, who was rumored to have been Mir Taqi Mir's rumored former lover,

at his home on one occasion (see Chapter Four). Firaq usually composed verse in the old

style of the Persian masters and only occasionally wrote Urdu poetry. Since he and

Qaʾim were such good friends, the tazkirah writer records one verse set in his work that

matches the meter, rhyme, and refrain of Pakbaz's verse that Ummid heard:

تماشا اس چمن کا کس کرے دل کو شاد کرتا ہے

کہ یاں تک لب تبسم غنچے کو برباد کرتا ہے

اسیروں کی قسم ہے اے صبا سچ کہہ کہ گلشن میں

کوئی ان ہم نواوں سے ہمیں بھی یاد کرتا ہے

Whose heart wouldn't be enlivened by this garden's spectacle?
For even to this point that smiling lip ravages the bud.

195

The prisoner's have an oath. Oh Spring wind, tell the truth for in the garden
Someone remembers even me because of our similarly sounding voices.
(Muhammad Qaʾim al-Din Qaʾim 1966: 141)

Based on the formal parallels between these verses and what we know of this particular

cohort's social make up, it would appear that Sauda, Pakbaz, Qaʾim, Firaq, and Ummid

were at a mushaʿirah together where a model verse ending with *-ād kartā hai* was the

basis or *tarh* for their gathering. Sure enough in Sauda's works we find this ghazal:

<div dir="rtl">
جو وہ پوچھے تجھے قاصد کہ سودا خوش تو رہتا ہے

تو یوں کہیو کبھی رو رو دل اپنا شاد کرتا ہے
</div>

Sauda still remains content with what ever he asks you [about me], oh postman.
So just say this: "Sometimes when you cry yourself out your heart gets light."
(Muhammad Rafiʿ Sauda 1971: I:573)

Also, we know that Pakbaz and Mir Taqi Mir were quite close, attending each other's

gatherings on a regular basis. Based on this association and Mir Taqi Mir's parallel verse

listed below, it would appear that Mir too was at this particular gathering.

<div dir="rtl">
ملایا خاک کر دامن سے اشکوں میں ڈبایا پھر

مرے ہاتھوں کی تردستی گریبان یاد کرتا ہے
</div>

After being cast in the dust, I dabbed my tears with my shirttails again.
The collar keeps my hands' dexterity in mind.
(Mir Muhammad Taqi Mir 2003: I:558)

These verses are examples of the metered and rhymed friendships that were built in the musha'irah's version of literary sociability. Contemporary writers make occasional notes about where and when musha'irahs happened, but to get to the heart of what was being circulated in musha'irahs of that time, one has to look for the implicit connections between the verses as chronicled in period compendiums. Through this almost archeological approach, we can see how the formal conventions of socio-literary practice illustrate the way poets reordered their interchanges and built stylistic connections through the exchange of parallel verse.

By reading in search of what today we call *ham-tarh* lines in historical literary compendiums, we see how the very concept of parallelism, having the same base or *ham-tarh,* meant something verse specific for the musha'irahs during the 1700s. As we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, tazkirah writers who were poets themselves elided the assessment of men and verse in that both could have *mauzūnīyat.* The term implies symmetry or metrical balance in verse, and when applied to people it connotes appropriateness and cultivation. At the level of the *bayāz* or pocket diary, it was important for poets to keep track of who poets competed with and what verses were used. The diary itself attested to its keeper's *mauzūnīyat* as it literary chronicled in

meter and verse the degree of their literary cultivation. Verses and comrades'

particulars are held in high esteem if they make it into a poet's diary, that is, if they

become *bayāzī*, to cite Wali and ʿUrfi again.

Nasir ʿAli reminds us the test of a poet is a ghazal's *tarh* or basis for rhyme,

meter, and refrain. Yet, the *tarh* is also literally a social basis as well, for it breeds active

connections between poets and what they remember, forming a material bond on the

page and social cohesiveness through a shared aesthetic experience. Also, it's important

to note that none of the tazkirah writers over the 1700s refer to verses as being *ham-*

tarh. It is only poets who have the same base. This was mentioned above, but it is

significant to revisit this concept. That is, poets become *ham-tarh* through the mutuality

of literary exchange in a mushaʿirah setting. They become stylistically and thematically

linked, and it was important for them to document these instances in their journals

which in turn informed some of the anecdotes that appeared in edited tazkirahs, which

are the final products we have today.

With all the tazkirah-writing going on, we get a glimpse of the literary sphere

happening during a time when mushaʿirahs were a common part of the poet's social

and compositional life. Additionally, several tazkirahs show how the ghazal's *tarh* forms

a formal poetic geography of meter, rhyme, and refrain between Urdu poets across late-Mughal India's map.

Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi's Three Tazkirahs

In their introductions, several tazkirah writers make distinctions between mere diary writing and assembling a final tazkirah which would constitute a larger more prestigious task. Yet, it was not until Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi 's 1802 *Riyāz al-Fushā* that we find explicit links between the textual practice of writing a tazkirah, the social praxis of assembling regular mushaʿirahs, and the textual process of maintaining a diary. Over this phase, Lucknow had become increasingly important as a center of literary patronage. After the 1757 sack of Delhi, there was another spate of tazkirah writing over the 1760s and 1770s with about eight well-known tazkirahs composed between 1774 and 1784 alone. While we will cover some of the anecdotes recorded in these tazkirahs below, I have not examined their verse samples for evidence of diary and recitational subtexts. They do not seem to explicitly note these connections but they may in fact be there.

Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi (1751-1824) was a poet, tazkirah writer, and mushaʿirah impresario who made some striking observations about mushaʿirah sociability. With the Maraths in the middle of a campaign against Delhi, Mus'hafi first went to Lucknow over during the first part of 1772, where he tried unsuccessfully to be a Persian language poet. There was not much possibility for patronage since Faizabad to the north was still the regional capital of Awadh and the region had not quite blossomed as it would under the joint patronage of Mughal and British influence. Mus'hafi left for Delhi at the end of 1772 and enrolled in the Ghazi al-Din Khan Madrasah to study Persian. The madrasah had hosted many literary gatherings since the time of Bedil, housed events over the 19th century, and remains a site for mushaʿirahs to this day. Mus'hafi probably lived in the madrasah compound itself where the school's regular mushaʿirahs may well have had an impact on him as he absorbed Delhi's cosmopolitan Persophone culture.

Over the 1770s, Mus'hafi took part in the many salons throughout the city, including gatherings at the homes of some of the poets mentioned above including Mir Taqi Mir, Mir Hasan, and Murtaza Khan Firaq. Mus'hafi worked at creating his own coterie of students over this time and completed his studies in 1777. When Mir Hasan

met Mus'hafi over these years, he notes that Mus'hafi was involved in trade to earn his

livelihood (*peshah-i tijārat basar mī bard*) so it was likely that Mus'hafi was very busy

juggling school, work, and making a name for himself in Delhi's literary scene. He was

able to this with some success for Muhammad Husain Azad records an anecdote about

Mir himself praising the young Mus'hafi's verse (2006: 210).

Mus'hafi's first tazkirah the *ʿIqd-i Suraiyā* (*The Necklace of the Pleiades*) covers the

Persian-language poets of Arzu's generation and before, the *tāzah-goʾi* writers who had

been popular in Delhi during from reign of ʿAlamgir Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) and into

Mus'hafi's contemporary age during the reign of Shah ʿAlam II (r. 1760-1806). Yet, he

begins his work by painting a picture of the Urdu literary scene of Delhi's 1770s.

> Having been satisfied with merely judging melodies, I occupied my time with
> copying and collecting Persian and *Hindī* ghazals. Yet, in spite of having no
> means in the abode of the Caliph, Shahjahanabad (Lord protect it from riots and
> discord), I cast the basis for an *Rekhtah* mushaʿirah such that it surpassed all the
> preceding ones. In spite of my complete command over the Persian language,
> according to the demand of the age [and] having extended my relationship with
> such poets, I engaged my time in composing *Rekhtah*. (2007: 1)

Rekhtah or *Hindī,* as the language was still called then, was already en vogue to the point

where a very socially active poet like Mus'hafi noted that though he prized his Persian

over Urdu for it's cultural capital and expression, much in the way Ghalib would as well

a generation later, he was compelled to recite Urdu on account of its popularity. He

continues:

> Occasionally, one encounters a speaker in this language, where on account of
> the duties of being his fellow-speaker, we would then drink from the chalice of
> poetry and open words and meaning from the closed cabinet of Persian's
> dictionary with these friends who understand the essences. [For] is this not the
> very *Rekhtah* poetry that in our present age by reason of its eloquence and
> rhetoric as a language is not even a degree less than Persian? May it be as salt
> sprinkled in the wounds of the heart and may it be salve for the torments of the
> dervishes. (Ibid.)

For Mus'hafi, Persian and Urdu's aesthetic and expressive qualities were equal. Yet it's

curious that Mus'hafi would be legitimating his Urdu abilities in a work covering

Persian language poets.

Having just completed his education in 1777 in which he had studied Persian

verse, prose, and aesthetics with some of the best teachers, one would never presume to

doubt Mus'hafi's command over what was still the main language of the Mughal

bureaucracy. In the context of Mus'hafi's regularly organized musha'irah, he presents a

glimpse of the multilingual nature of poetry gatherings during the 1770s.

> In the recent days when I organized a musha'irah gathering at my humble
> abode, [the *munshī* and poet] Mirza Muhammad Hassan with pen name *Qatīl*
> happened to pass by from the gracious home of [his patron] nawab Zuʾlfiqar al-

Daula Bahadur[83] in Shahjahanabad when the well-spring of a Persian ghazal eloquated into the ear of this discerning individual as an argument over Persian verse recitation erupted in the gathering of *Rekhtah* writers. Certainly the extinguished fire of my tongue's Persian had been caused to flare up. Usually, in those days [Qatil and I] became mutually purposed (*ham-tarh*) together and seized the lead ball from each other [in poetic competition]. (Ibid.)

Mus'hafi's gatherings must have been lively affairs if someone walking by in the street could hear the participants' arguments echoing.[84] One young poet with the pen name Mast would often come to Mus'hafi's gatherings in Delhi. Mus'hafi presented a *misraʿ-i tarh* in his ghazal which ends with this couplet:

اب مصحفی تو جانے ترا کام مری جان
کی ہم نے تو اپنی سی جو کچھ ہو سکتی ہم سے

Now, oh Mus'hafi, you must know your work, my dear.
Whatever could have happened with me, I made it my very own.
(Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi 2003: II:318)

Mast responded with this line:

مشاعرہ میں چلو مست مصحفی جو کہے
کبھی ملا تو کرے بارے مہرباں ہم سے

_____

[83] Najaf Khan Zuʾlfiqar al-Daula Bahadur (1712-1782)

[84] Bindraban Das Khushgu made the similar observations about Bedil's gatherings, stating Bedil read verse so loudly that anyone outside in the alley walking by would know that in Bedil's house there was a mushaʿirah happening.

"Go the the mushaʿirah, Mast," is what Mus'hafi said.
"If we shall ever get a chance to keep on meeting, then it would be very gracious of you." (Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi 1933: 228)

Qatil (1758-1817), with whom Mus'hafi was also very close, was a significant character in Delhi and later Lucknow's literary scene. Qatil wrote three works on *inshā*, a Persian *dīwān*, a grammar book, a collection of letters, and a unique ethnography on customs of Hindus and Muslims in India written for an Iranian traveller. This was especially interesting considering that Qatil had actually converted to Shiʿi Islam and was previously known as Diwani Singh; "Qatil had stepped away from his own culture of origin and made himself its ethnographer" (Alam and Subrahmanyam 2012: 426).

As Mus'hafi's friend, Qatil had a unique point of view to offer the young poet who probably revered Qatil for his accomplishment in Persian belle lettres and his connections to the Mughal elite from whom Mus'hafi was actively seeking patronage. It was a fortuitous event that Qatil happened to pass by Mus'hafi's mushaʿirah coming back from Najaf Khan's home and heard the argument about Persian recitation in an Urdu gathering. Indeed, it was Qatil's point of view that we see in Mus'hafi's *ʿIqd-i Suraiyā*. Mus'hafi notes:

> Since the aforementioned sir had toured all over and had passed through the gatherings of the honorable and ignoble, he had carefully engraved the particulars of his contemporaries into his own *bayāz.* (2007: 1)

Mus'hafi goes on to say that Qatil allowed him to copy some of this information which became actually the *ʿIqd-i Suraiyā,* which is really more like a glorified *bayāz* even by Mus'hafi's account. Qatil may have been the one to tell Mus'hafi about Bedil's grave and the mushaʿirah that used to happen there. Also, Qatil probably had a better command of Persian than Mus'hafi since he was employed a *munshī.* Mus'hafi hoped they would remain friends for years to come. Later when Qatil and Mus'hafi had settled in Lucknow in the 1780s, Mus'hafi would side with his old friend in an argument that erupted in a mushaʿirah chronicled in Nasir's *Khush Maʿrikah-i Zebā* and discussed in great detail by Frances Pritchett (Saʿdat Khan Nasir 1972: 892-4). When Qatil openly objected to a verse recited by Lalah Mauji Ram Mauji, and Mauji sought Mus'hafi's defense, the ustad responded, "A friendship oughtn't be ruined for the sake of a student. Many such as those can be had" (Saʿdat Khan Nasir 1972: 514).

Mus'hafi himself was no stranger to discord in the mushaʿirah and it was a prolonged literary war with his former friend Insha Allah Khan (1756-1817) and their respective students that pushed Mus'hafi out of the mushaʿirah ring as he retreated

from Lucknow's literary sphere. Writing in 1806, nearly twenty years after he had left

Delhi and settled in his new city, Mus'hafi hints at the mushaʿirah incident of 1798 that

pushed him into semi-retirement:

> It has been an eternity over the last few years for poor me after those so-called friends had their way with my words. I am now throwing off the black cloak of ill fortune from my shoulders and am waiting anonymously in the corner of retirement and contentment. I had renounced poems and poets and any meetings with lords and ladies since I have been offended by the savage cruelty of that community.

It is only from Nasir's *Khush Maʿrikah-i Zebā* that we get the gory details of this incident

that clearly scarred Mus'hafi to the point of bowing out of the mushaʿirah scene for two

years before starting a small gathering for his close students and disciples.

"In my experience, these gatherings usually last no longer than a year before

discord and conflict break them up," Mus'hafi summarily states in *Riyāz al-Fushā* (1985a:

264). It was an accurate pronouncement since the literary feud even got the nawab of

Awadh involved in the discord.

Insha and Mus'hafi were two of the most well respected poets in Lucknow and

they were both being patronized by the Mughal prince Mirza Muhammad Sulaiman

Shikoh (1765-1838), the son of the emperor Shah Alam II (r. 1760-1806). Like many

members for the royalty during this time, Sulaiman was himself a poet and took great

interest in literature while he was away from Delhi, his ancestors' home. Since

Sulaiman was still a relatively young man, it would appear he was living the rarified life

of a *mirza* or prince with near limitless wealth in Lucknow at a time when its gatherings

and parties were eclipsing Delhi's social scene which must have seemed sleepy to the

young prince.

The story goes that Sulaiman wanted to pit Mus'hafi and Insha against each

other since they were such famous poets in the city basking in his patronage. On the

pretext that Mus'hafi had made some remarks unsuitable to a king, Sulaiman made

Insha swear on his head that he would have Mus'hafi publicly ridiculed (*ruswāʾī-i khāss

wa ʿāmm kiyā jāʾe*). Insha accepted the challenge but he did not know that he too would

be openly mocked.

When Mus'hafi and Insha were sitting with Sulaiman, Mus'hafi finished reading

a ghazal that end with this couplet:

یوں زلف کرے حلقے میں پھنسا مصحفی وائے وائے
جوں طوق میں ہووے کسی مجنون کی گردن

Mus'hafi has been hanged in chains of his tresses, like this, Oh my:
It must be like the neck of some Majnun in fetters.

207

Insha quickly responded with: "Your head is a mango, your neck is a picked mango slice/You are one whom neither a grasshopper's nor a wasp's neck fits" (trans. Pritchett 1994: 320). The lines preformed as promised and the people of the bazaar liked it so much they put it to melody. Insha, goaded by this show of praise, composed a whole ghazal that further insulted Mus'hafi. Sulaiman joined in as well with a verse set mocking the poet.

At this point Mus'hafi's students Khalil, Muntazir, and Garm could not stand by while their ustad was being ridiculed and all three composed ghazals in response to these insults. It is important to bear in mind that all these metered missives where strictly adhering to the original "ground" or *zamīn* in which Mus'hafi had first planted his initial ghazal recited before Sulaiman Shikoh. It ended with ___ *kī gardan* "the neck of a ...." He had no idea that this rather banal ghazal would turn into such a large literary fight.

Eventually Jurʾat (d. 1745-1810) and another poet brought Insha and Mus'hafi together to reconcile in another mushaʿirah at Sulaiman's home. They appeared to reconcile but only outwardly. Mus'hafi came prepared and recited a verse in a new but very difficult *zamīn* thinking that it would require too much effort for Insha and

Sulaiman Shikoh to rework the ghazal as an insult against him. The first and final couplets are from Mus'hafi:

زہرا کی جب آئی کف باروت میں انگلی
کی رشک نے جا دیدۂ ماروت میں انگلی
۔ ۔ ۔
تھا مصحفی یہ مائل گریہ کہ پس مرگ
تھی اس کی دھری چشم پہ تابوت میں انگلی

> When Venus' finger came into the Angel Harut's hand,
> Then jealousy put a finger in the Angel Marut's eye.
>
> ...
> Oh Mus'hafi, he was such a crybaby that even after dying,
> In the coffin, he had a finger stuck in his eye [wiping away his tears].

The audience at the musha'irah enjoyed the ghazal and showed their praise. Yet, it would seem that Mus'hafi's new ghazal in fact had the opposite effect. Insha still felt he hadn't gotten the justice he deserved after Muntazir and Garm had insulted him. With an ending like —*ūt meiñ unglī,* Insha quickly rattled off a ghazal couplet containing an insult any native speaker of Hindi or Urdu even today could have seen coming:

زہرا کی گئی کب کف باروت میں انگلی
کب رشک نے کی دیدۂ ماروت میں انگلی

وہ چرخ پہ قیدی یہ کنویں میں تھے بچارے
اس جھوٹے کی جورو کے کرو چوت میں انگلی

209

Venus' finger never went into the Angel Harut's hand!
Jealousy never put his finger in the Angel Marut's eye!

They were imprisoned on earth, those poor guys were sent down a well!
Instead put a finger in the cunt of this liar's wife!

Aside from the insult in the second couplet, Insha was playing off of an intertextual image that Mus'hafi had first introduced to honor their patron Sulaiman Shikoh. In The Qurʾan in the of book of *al-Baqrah* the angels Harut and Marut were sent down to earth during the reign of the prophet Sulaiman, or King Solomon in the Judeo-Christian tradition, to teach his people to avoid the evil of black magic, which they had been learning from some of Satan's local minions. The popular story goes that Harut and Marut actually succumbed to the temptations of earth and in punishment were hung upside down in a well near Babylon until the Day of Judgement.

Of course this started a new round of missives launched back and forth with Insha on one side and Muntazir and Garm on the other. As with the examples above, all the barbs were in parallel rhyme, meter, and refrain. The battle reached a head when Insha took the mushaʿirah to the streets getting the local British-trained fire department (*āg* company *talingah*) and bunch of clowns (*sāng*) to march with him down to Mus'hafi's house while he recited a quintain:

مجھ سے سحر کہہ گئی آکے نسیم چمن
سانگ نیا لائے گا اب کے یہ چرخ کہن
آتے ہیں مجھ کو نظر کچھ کڈھب اس کے چلن
گُڈّا بنائے گا وہ صاف جو ہوں مرد و زن
اور کہے گا یہ بیں مصفی و مصفن

پھر انہیں بایک دگر _____ کرائے گا وہ
ہاتھوں پر ان کو اٹھا گت سے نچائے گا وہ
پھر خچہ دھڑ دھڑ کرے ساتھ گت سے بجائے گا وہ
منتظر و گرم کو خوب رجھائے گا وہ
ہوئے گا اظہار سب ان میں ہے جو بانکپن

The garden's zephyr came and said to me,
"Now a new circus will be brought to this old world!"
But there is unsightliness to its walk that I can see.
Though they might be man and wife, clearly they can be made into puppets,
And they will say this is the male Mus'hafi and this the female Mus'hafin

Then they will be made to _____ one another
They will be put on someone's hands and be made to dance around.
Then with some loud thumping they will be smacked up against each other.
And then Muntazir and Garm will be truly annoyed.
That way their debauchery will be put out in the open for everyone.

At the moment the procession reached Mus'hafi's house in Ahmad Nagar

Lucknow, an order arrived from the nawab Asaf al-Daulah who was away on business

saying, "this type of discord on my account only causes dishonor." The strife ended but

not before Mus'hafi's student Muntazir could get in the last word:

<div dir="rtl">

ہو پار جو گنگا کرے تو اب پار ہے بیڑا

بے طرح تجھے باد مخالف نے ہے گھیرا

سمجھا میں یہ جس بات کا سارا ہے بکھیڑا

لقمے کے عوض بجو کا کھایا ہو تھپیڑا

پیڑے کو گلہری تری متھرا گئی بھڑوے

</div>

Whosever on other side of the Ganges, now the rabble is at an end.
Now an oncoming wind has blockaded you in with no support!
The thing I understood about this whole affair's difficulty is that
Instead of a lampoon's morsel you took a slap to the face!
Your squirrel ran off to Mathura with your sweets, you pimp!

In spite of Mus'hafi's student Muntazir ending the event, the poet sent himself into exile since this "community" of listeners and reciters had insulted him so much. In Nasir's telling in his tazkirah, Mus'hafi appears to stay out of the fray with his students instead stepping up to battle Insha's barbs. Muhammad Husain Azad placed Nasir's telling in *Āb-i Hayāt* but had Mus'hafi reciting many of the lines that Nasir gives to Muntazir and Garm.

Writing in 1802 after about six years of self-imposed exile from all musha'irahs, Mus'hafi writes that he begins to recover:

> As I began to regain my composure the chains of poetry started to shake. It was one day that Sheikh Muhammad ʿIssa Tanha came and said to me, "Hey *Qiblah*, if some people were got together to hang out I could practice my verse, but it would be best and most fitting to get your honored opinion."

212

> I advised him [to hold it] in the open area outside of the city that people say is
> totally illuminated. We could arrange it in such a way that that there would be
> less participation from other's gatherings and few competitor's students in
> attendance. Though I was actually retired those days, I pursued this affair for
> the sake of my friends. (Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi 1985b: 16)

Mus'hafi's desire to steer himself clear of the mushaʿirah competitiveness could not be
clearer. The "generous rivalry" had crossed into the realm of personal injury for him
and perhaps financial ruin. Though Mus'hafi makes it sound as though he was
eventually rewarded for maintaining his dignity through out the events, Sulaiman
returned to Delhi because of the throne's demands and Mus'hafi had to seek new
patronage elsewhere.

In the midst of this, Mus'hafi attempted to honor Tanha's request mentioned
above, but it was difficult. While Muntazir and Garm were "twin candles" of the
gathering, even they could not help sustain Mus'hafi's post-exile mushaʿirahs. Muntazir
died of tuberculosis and Garm was called off to the town of Kalpi near Allahabad.
Luckily another close friend came to Mus'hafi's aid:

> During that time, I happened to run into Mirza Muhammad Taqi Khan Bahadur
> "Hawas," who I had known for a long time. Grabbing the reigns of the elephant,
> he asked me how I was doing. Then and there he made a decisive pledge to me
> and asked me to visit him at his home. The handsome friend of mine, Mirza
> Hyder ʿAli was in Lucknow those days, and I went along with him to Hawas'
> house with the other warm hearted literati....and from that day and in the four

years since, I have been his friend and servant. Whatever is allotted to me is from him and is a gift due to his consideration. Praise be to God the almighty, Hawas started up the musha'irah again. (Ibid.)

Mus'hafi writes that after this new group of reciters began gathering again, he felt the need to record the particulars of new literary friends with whom he had been exchanging verse over the last 6 years, roughly 1800-1806. He states rather beautifully, "This diary, which is the apple of the sages' eye, may the blackness of its ink be mascara on the gentlemen of knowledge and perception"—he is alluding to the idea that kohl improves eyesight. For the reader, it is an apt description, as it too will improve our perception of the literary communities held during this time period.

The *Riyāz al-Fushā*'s most interesting attribute is that its ink actually does improve our view of the musha'irah. Of the 1700s' tazkirahs it most clearly shows it origins as a *bayāz* at the formal level. That is, we see a first-hand account of how Mus'hafi recorded his friend's and students verses as they were recited in the gathering. As Mus'hafi himself tells us, the *Riyāz al-Fushā* was written for his latest group of friends assembled for Hawas' musha'irahs and all these gatherings were organized around a *misra'-i tarh* or model verse upon which all subsequent compositions were to be based.

214

Of the roughly two hundred fifty poets he lists, forty of them show a clear connection to the musha‘irahs he was hosting between 1800 and 1806 through their parallel verses. Mus'hafi himself elucidates this by stating which poets were going to his musha‘irah and the events organized by his friends. From these clues, one can then examine the verses to see who was *ham-tarh,* in the 18th-century sense of the term, with other poets. That is, we can read across the rhyme and refrains to look for parallel compositions, and there are many. In turn, this reveals a concerted effort on Mus'hafi's part to document what people were reciting and composing in these literary circles. Verses were being recorded by a scribe, by another musha‘irah participant at the moment of recitation or simply by Mus'hafi himself in his diary. The other possibility was that poets were giving him copies of their poems written down for him to memorialize in his tazkirah. Whatever the case may be, all the verses were worthy of a note in someone's diary.

This process of textually recording recitations was probably a combination of practices that enabled such a detailed but implicit account of Mus'hafi's musha‘irahs to emerge. Yet, a Persian tazkirah written earlier in the century elucidates this further. If we remember, parts of Bindraban Das Khushgu's *Safīnah* reads like an autograph book

where in some of his entries he tells who came to his gatherings and if they noted their

ghazals in his diary. For instance, Shah Walli Allah (1703-1762) came to Khushgu's

gatherings and so did Mubarak Abru (1692-1748). Khushgu proudly tells us they recited

and later wrote their compositions in his journal. It would have been a convenient

practice to send around a rough bound diary, a quill, and ink to the participants for

them to record in a book what they composed for the musha'irah. Curiously, Mus'hafi

seems to verify the existence of such a text in an entry in the *Riyāz.* On the poet

Hamdan, Mus'hafi writes that he has no idea who he could be, but he was at Hawas'

musha'irah and recited something so pleasing that it "laid the city to waste" (ibid.: 388).

The ghazal was also recited according to the *misra'-i tarh* given that day, and it was

recorded in a friend's *kitāb-i mushā'irah.*

A "musha'irah book" or *kitāb-i mushā'irah* is not something I have encountered

in any other tazkirah or archive, but it hints at what Khushgu was trying to accomplish

with his *Safīnah.* Even in the musha'irah's oral setting for poetry recitation, the

participants were very interested in presenting a complete documentation of what was

said and who said it. While Mus'hafi did not record Hamdan's verse in his diary, when

he wanted to assemble the tazkirah he knew he could turn to his friend who kept a

kitāb-i mushāʿirah which must have been a written record of recitations and poets. We

presume the *kitāb-i mushaʿirah* had no other particulars beyond a name and some

verses, had there been more information Mus'hafi would have copied that down as well.

Given its presumed textual attributes, it would appear this *kitāb-i mushāʿirah* was an

early *guldastah,* the "playbook" of poets' verses that would emerge as genre of print in

the 19th century. Here is Hamdam's couplet:

<div dir="rtl">

سدا خورشید کو ہو رشک جس کرے روئے روشن پر
ثمر کیوں کر جھکا دے سر نہ اس کرے نعل توسن پر

</div>

The sun must always be jealous of the one with a lit face,
Lest wealth shall bow its head on the hoof of his hot-blood horse. (Ibid.: 388)

The poet Mirza Hajwi ʿAshiq also read at Hawas' mushaʿirahs, so Mus'hafi tells

us. He was also a young man with a balanced disposition and had a knack for *marsīyah*

and *salām* compositions. It would appear that ʿAshiq also presented a ghazal when

Hamdan recited such a memorable ghazal. Here is ʿAshiq's verse:

<div dir="rtl">

نہ کھولو سنبل مشکیں کو روئے رشک گلشن پر
شب دیجور کو ترجیح ہوگی روز روشن پر

</div>

Do not open the black hyacinth in front of the garden's jealousy.
The dark night must have a preference for the light of the day. (Ibid.: 226)

217

Mus'hafi was apparently inspired by Hamdan's "city-destroying" poem and used this

particular *tarh* as a foundation to compose three very long ghazals using. The opening

couplet from is given below:

<div dir="rtl">

زبان نالہ کش کس کی ہوئی سرگرم شیون پر

گداز موم کا عالم نظر آتا ہے آہن پر

</div>

> Whose lamenting tongue was occupied with mourning?
> The anguish of the candles' world can be seen on the iron.
> (Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi 2003: II:90)

At the very least, these parallels illustrate how Hawas, Mus'hafi, Hamdam, and ʿAshiq

composed literature together; they were *ham-tarh* as evidenced by the very *tarh* by

which they composed verse: *-n par*. In addition to the textual practices behind

documenting mushaʿirahs, the verses all show the nuances behind composing verse,

working with theme and meaning, and adhering to difficult meters.

The parallel verses chronicle an implicit structural logic behind imitative

paradigms in Persophone verse. The 18th-century usage of the *ham-tarh* concept is

appropriate in both the social and the linguistic realms because it reveals how verse

structures literary sociability. Additionally, it provides further evidence for which

historians have been looking in the wrong places based on misunderstandings the 1700s

literary gatherings. That is, we have to develop a new method for reading which I have

218

demonstrated here that concentrates on textual practices and sociolinguistic parallels across the poetic and cultural contexts. Tazkirahs, which show a clear connection to pocket diaries, carry an implicit sublayer of recited verse. As seen in Mus'hafi's work, the prose gives us a rough sketch of who was reciting together. From there I make connections between the poets by looking for *ham-tarh* verse. Poets were literary standing on the same ground (*ham-zamīn*) when they shared parallel recitations together, they occupied the same space poetically and physically. This method of reading provides poetic and social route to understanding how literary communities are founded by the physicality of recited verse and Persophone imitative paradigms.

Mus'hafi with his diary, writing down his dear friends' verse is the image these parallel verses reveal for us. They show a specific and personal connection built through recited verse. Mus'hafi writes that he visited the poet and professional letter writer Mughal Fani, "the founder of a prose gathering (*munāsirah*) in his city of Lucknow":

> It was approximately the first gathering where the residents of India and others were present for prose writing in Persian or *Rekhtah*. By chance, my way happened to the place where the prose writing *munshī*s were participating that day. I read a description of a *pān* seller's shop in the style of Zuhuri that I had written earlier. (1985b: 264)

In the context of a gathering for the exchange of prose, Mus'hafi makes it appear that

both Persian and Urdu were being used. This is significant as it provides us with further

evidence that both Persian and Urdu were used in the mushaʿirah setting. Mus'hafi

chose to present something he had written in the prose style of the famous *tāzah-goʾī*

writer Zuhuri.[85] He continues describing Mughal Fani's prose gatherings, and notes his

own popularity:

> Fani became very interested in my usual mushaʿirah [with Hawas] and started
> coming and going with me sometimes. As it turned out, his prose recitation
> gathering gradually turned into a mushaʿirah too; and having shelved the pages
> of the album of the prose writers' pictures, the times brought forth a different
> card player. That is, because of my going to the sitting it mainly became a large
> gathering of my students where ghazal recitation passed to the exalted listeners
> of "bravo" and s*ubhān Allah* [in my praise]. During that time, the *munshī*s of the
> magical words had their tongues silenced since other than listening to poems
> they did not even have a place in the party. (Ibid)

The prose gathering turning into a mushaʿirah was not a surprising outcome given that

Mus'hafi had dozens of poets in his coterie in spite of his recent retirement. Fani would

remain Mus'hafi's friend and they exchanged letters according to Saʿdat Khan Nasir

---

[85] Copies of Zuhuri's *Seh Nasr-i Zuhūrī* were often found in madrasahs to provide students examples of the writer's prose. Mus'hafi too had probably read this book during his time in the Ghazi al-Din madrasah. Additionally, the debate over Persian usage and *tāzah-goʾī* aesthetics begun in the early 1600s and revived by Arzu and Hazin in the 1740s was still underway in Mus'hafi's context. The only difference was that Urdu poetry had clearly gained popularity.

(1971: 45). Fani wrote a verse set in honor of Mus'hafi that was read at one of the

musha‘irahs Fani and Mus'hafi frequented together.

سحر زلفوں میں ہے اور معجزہ گفتار میں ہے
فتنہ آنکھوں میں ہے محشر تری رفتار میں ہے

سچ ہے یہ ہوتا ہے اقرار میں اک لطف عجب
پر مزا کیا کہوں جیسا ترے انکار میں ہے

فانی مے پینے کو آیا نہیں شاید یارو
شور کم آج بہت خانۂ خمار میں ہے

There is magic in your tresses and a miracle in your words;
There is chaos in your eyes and the an apocalypse in your sway.

It's true that in confessing my sins there is a strange delight,
But what can I say about the delight in even your refusal?

Hey friends, Fani is not about to drink any wine.
[Since] today there is little tumult in the drunkard's house.

Mus'hafi also wrote a ghazal according to this pattern and its ending verse references

its own recitation:

مصحفی ایک غزل اور بھی پڑھ اس میں کہ یار
زور انداز فصاحت ترے اشعار میں ہے

Oh Mus'hafi recite just one more ghazal here, buddy,
For there is the shock and awe of eloquence of your poems. (2003)

221

Conclusion

Over the course of the chapter I have shown the rise of imitative paradigms

within Urdu mushaʿirahs as a mode of literary sociability. Both the social and the

linguistic practices of the mushaʿirah are bound by the concerns the *tāzah-goʾī* poets

had developed over the course of the 1600s and 1700s which focused on originality

within a closed system of themes and meanings that had to be pushed to its limits. For

poets reciting in a mushaʿirah, the politics of imitation had very tangible outcomes

which could ruin reputations, as we saw with Hazin, or cut off patronage as in

Mus'hafi's case. Yet even in the contentious realm of the "elegant encounter," poets

return to the social and literary bases that ground their practices. For poets in a society

of reciters and listeners, the verse becomes a literal map of alliances and competitions

mapped out in diaries clutched near their hearts.

The first part of the chapter focused on the nature of plagiarism which poets

defined as either inadvertent (*tavārud*) or intentional (*sarqah*). Sabat and Mir's

respective gripes with Hazin and Yaqin show that arguing over originality of theme was

an overdetermined fight. Shafiq Aurangabadi's education under Azad Bilgrami reveals

itself when he takes apart Mir's attacks on Yaqin's worthwhile poetry. When

accusations of plagiarism blossomed it was in the context of the mushaʿirah which

encouraged poets to begin leveling attacks on each other about stylistics and

originality.

The second part of the chapter covers how these processes are vernacularized in

from 1740 until 1810 or so. Within this context we see how Urdu poets concern for

imitative paradigms becomes concentrated in the social and poetic processes of

becoming *ham-tarh*. This polysemic concept in the 18th century owes its origins to the

tāzah-goʾī setting whereby people are socially aligned according to a shared base

through parallel poetry where poets literally stand on the same ground. This is in

contrast to the instantiated 19th-century definition which informs our understanding

of the term today. But solely focusing on poetry being *ham-zamīn* to the exclusion of the

social processes, allows too much of literary formality to eclipse social relationships.

Using Hatim's intervention in his *Son of a Dīwān* as start, the chapter's second section

examines how poets used the imitative basis of verse in parallel rhyme, meter, and

refrain to construct networks of literary sociability. Hence, the late 1700s literary

sphere kept friendships measured and allowed for indulgent competitions.

Chapter 3
Pestering Hazin: Comportment and Manners in the Mushaʿirah

<div dir="rtl">

نیست آسان ربط قیل وقال ناموزون خلق

سکته می‌خواند نفس تا لب فراهم می‌شود

</div>

It's not easy be in contact with all the unbalanced noise and fuss of the public
The breath would recite a cesura so that the lip would be prepared to speak.

In this chapter I examine how the mushaʿirah's socio-aesthetic force relies on its participants being adept at judging both men and their verse (*mardum shanāsī o sukhan sanjī*) according to the same lyric and ethical criteria. Related terms derived from the Urdu and Persian concept of *mauzūnīyat* (symmetry and appropriateness) demonstrate this connection. First, the term *shiʿr mauzūn kardan* means to cast a poem and implies that poetry writing itself cultivates balance, appropriateness, and poise in the composer. Second, the term *mauzūn shudan* (to be balanced or appropriate) refers not just to the poem being balanced but also to the poem's speaker embodying these qualities in a social setting. Third, the people who attended gatherings are members of the appropriate classes or the initiates into Persian language and literature, the so-called *mauzūnān,* who recite poems appropriately metered and containing the proper use of Persophone lyrical tropes (*shiʿr-i mauzūn).* Because verse and men seem to inhabit

224

the same register of assessment, literature is often assigned an ethical value where

upholding lyric convention is understood as a form of justice (*insāf*).[86] This concept of

balance and justice informs the affiliation bred between mushaʿirah participants,

forming the idealized conception of Indo-Persian literary sociability. Tazkirah writers

concentrate on how men and poems are both *mauzūn* (balanced, appropriate, elegant,

well-proportioned, symmetrical, rhythmic) and forcing the historian to reconsider the

social role of literary production in Safavid-Mughal society.

In this chapter, I examine how the mushaʿirah was a staging ground to assess,

scrutinize, and sometimes to violate norms of balance and decorum. *Adab* is a far-

reaching concept that indexes literature, proper speech, decorum, and respect, acting

as a script through which social actors perform a mastery of the self in relation to

others. *Adab* is a learned mode of refinement in which social actors seek to be

recognized and also to provide recognition to others. Eighteenth-century

epistemologies on *adab* capture the idea of a controlled masculinity in the court, on the

street, and in the private and semi-pubic settings at focus in this project (Metcalf 1984;

---

[86] If we remember to Chapter One, Munir Lahori claims that the iron-hearted practitioners of *tāzah-goʾī* aesthetics perverted his sense of literary justice. In the last chapter this happens again but in a real mushaʿirah where Bindrabandas Khushgu asks for literary justice at the foot of his hero ʿAbd al-Qadir Bedil's grave.

Richards 1984; O'Hanlon 1999, 2007). That is not to say women were not purveyors of

adab in 18th-century Mughal India. In fact, women did display proper roles of

comportment and speech within the idealized representations of mushaʿirah-based

sociability (Minault 1998, 2009). Atuni Begum and Nur Jahan wrote their verses to their

respondents in paper-based mushaʿirahs showing their adherence to rules of

comportment in concert their witty and well-timed responses. By mushaʿirah standards

they had "balanced natures" in regard to literary speech. As shown in the last chapter,

female poets could have "unbalanced" poetic natures as well. Sauda derides his

competitor's daughter who apparently penned some verse that Sauda thought received

unwarranted praise, illustrating her unbalanced nature or general inappropriateness

(see Appendix W). In the coming chapters, courtesans also appear as showing their

willingness to abide *adab*-based conventions. The gendered element of masculine *adab*

reveals how men posture themselves in the public sphere and helps us to understand

the terms in which certain characters are allowed and even expected to violate social

norms.

In 18th-century Mughal society, the mushaʿirah was one of many semi-public

institutions that cultivated *adab,* but anecdotes in period tazkirahs broadcast instances

where poets violated or fiddled with the social and poetic etiquette engendered by

adab. As discussed by recent scholarship on Mughal-era social norms (Eickelman and

Piscatori 2004; Faruqui 2012), our historical image of elite conduct in gatherings and

public society relies on idealized notions of control and containment prized by the

Mughal court and its attending officials. Literary tazkirahs appear to uphold these same

social norms but they also reflect the playful atmosphere of the mushaʿirah context or

the *majlis* in general. The mushaʿirah setting urges poets to show off their wit and

original poetic abilities through recasting linguistic and poetic structures. Yet at the

same time, the pleasure of the mushaʿirah also depends on certain kinds of restraint as

its success relies on its ability to produce a tension between the measured

comportment of its participants and the levity of their speech. This tension is also

characteristic of the tazkirah's form of literary historiography as well. In this world,

poets are considered paragons of literary and social excellence, yet their idiosyncrasies

are also valued. If they have a compromising habit, exhibit an embarrassing story, or

lose themselves in a bombastic outburst, these instances only sharpen a poet's frail

position as a human channel of verse.

In many ways, the playfulness of *adab* permeates almost all the musha'irah

anecdotes examined in this dissertation. Persian and Urdu literary histories from the

late Safavid and Mughal era are animated by many trickster figures who serve as

exemplars of wit and irony. It's no surprise that laughter, and even uncontrolled

laughter, was a regular occurrence in the musha'irah setting. Tazkirah writers seemed

to revel in recording those outbursts as much as the attendees who actually heard the

jokes and quips seemed to enjoy retelling them.

In this chapter I concentrate on three arenas. First, I examine how Urdu and

Persian musha'irah participants valued humor to the point where a violation of code or

an act of rude behavior served to enliven a tazkirah narrative. The next sections looks

at violations that earned the moral condemnation of mid-century-Delhi's literary

community. If we remember from the previous chapter, Hazin's conduct in a

musha'irah appeared to instigate Arzu and his circle into a literary blitzkrieg on the

poet. Strangely, visiting Hazin becomes a narrative trope for tazkirah writers in the

18th century as they sought out the Persian master to legitimate their verse and to see

if he really had the bad attitude for which he was known. Lastly, I examine the

sociability bred by stimulants and alcohol consumed in the musha'irah space. The

coffeehouse institution from West Asia and Iran took root in Delhi for a brief time until

the colonial import of tea ended the coffeehouse in the 19th century (Frank 1996; Rudi

Matthee 1996; Lutgendorf 2012). Stimulants and the spaces for consuming them created

another context to develop Urdu and Persian literary sociability at the borders between

propriety and spontaneity. This is evident in a range of anecdotes about poets reciting

verses in coffee houses smoking various substances and drinking with friends.

3.1 Decorum to be Upheld and Violated

The mushaʿirah in the 1700s has traditionally been understood as a purely male

space. As we saw in Chapter One, there was a perhaps was a generally accepted idea

that women could participate best in mushaʿirah by deferring their recitations through

writing. Yet there are a few instances where women seem have found a place within

actual mushaʿirah gatherings as courtesans. Azad Bilgrami notes an incident in 1736

where he and some poets had an impromptu literary exchange at the home of of these

women:

> On my way through Lucknow, I happened to alight at the abode of some
> courtesans (eshīʾān). There on that day there was a gathering of talented
> individuals such as Sheikh ʿAbd al-Raza Matin of Isfahan, Aqa ʿAbd-al-Ali Tahsin

of Kashmir,[87] and Mirza Daud of Akbarabad. On the last day a jolly gathering lasted until late in the night. (Ghulam ʿAli Azad Bilgrami 1913: 208)

Clearly some kind of poetry recitation was happening in women's presence but Bilgrami does not tell us if they were participating as poets. Courtesans in the early 1700s did compose verse in Persian, later in Urdu during the late-18th century, and throughout the 19th century as well (ʿAbd al-Haʾi Safa 1891). The Hindu dancing girl or *kanchinī* named Babri Rindi was a disciple of Bedil and took correction from him for her Persian verse (see Appendix R). In his description of her, Khushgu makes it appear as though Rindi maintains decorum in front of the saintly Bedil by having renounced her promiscuity before she met him (1959: 90-1).

Over fifty years later, Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi would also note two courtesans who composed ghazals that he recorded in their entirety in his second tazkirah from 1794 (1933; 1985: 280-1). The first was a courtesan named Zinat, who wrote under the pen name Nazuk. One of Mus'hafi's acquaintances in Faizabad, Mustahasan Khaliq, was connected with Nazuk because she loved him and she would give him her ghazals whenever he had to decamp with his military unit.

---

[87] This is the same Tahsin that Hindi was flirting with over *bhāng* on the banks of the Jamuna. ʿAbd al-Raza Matin was gained some notoriety in Delhi before eventually moving to Lucknow.

The other was a highly accomplished courtesan named Moti from

Shahjahanabad who catered to the lords of enjoyment, the men of taste, and those who

held respect (*tawā'if-i arbāb-i nishāt wa sahib-i mazāq wa zī-yi aᶜtibār*). She became the kept

woman of an Indian-born Iranian bureaucrat named Mirza Ibrahim Beg Maqtul whom

Mus'hafi first met in Delhi. Maqtul seldom composed verse and though he considered

himself a student of Mus'hafi's, it seems the two were more inclined toward friendship

rather than a student-teacher arrangement.

Mus'hafi later saw Maqtul in Lucknow at his home. Seeing them together

Mus'hafi was struck by the fact that even after leaving Delhi Maqtul was still caught

under the spell of loyalty to his Delhi courtesan (*bar jādū-yi wafādārī qā'im*). Mus'hafi

notes that Moti would present herself well (*basyār bah khūbī pesh mī āyad*) which I

presume to mean she revealed her literary cultivation and presented her poems with

flair. He goes on to record one of her Urdu ghazals in its entirety. A particularly

interesting line from it reads: Oh *Nāsih*, although you stitched the tear in my collar, / A

darning thread is still there and here I am" (see Appendix I; Ibid.).

In the 18th century, most of the few recorded mushaᶜirah anecdotes that we

have list only men as participants, but it is plain that courtesans were part of the

mushaʿirah space in some capacity that was seldom documented. In the case of Nazuk

and Moti, they seemed to have earned their place in the tazkirah chronology on

account of their connection to the men who loved and patronized them, which in turn

allowed both to have a public literary presence. In the case of Moti, it is very probable

that she recited her entire ghazal to Mus'hafi when he visited her and Ibrahim Beg

Maqtul in Lucknow. As a courtesan informally connected to Maqtul, it was not

incumbent upon her to keep the social conventions of *pardah,* or sex segregation,

customary in Islamic society during the 18th century. Additionally, since Maqtul was

openly connected with her, as evidenced by their joint move from Delhi to Lucknow, it

seems Mus'hafi was not compelled to conceal this information. As a semi-public object

of desire, she could have easily recited her verse before Mus'hafi without violating

conventions on honor and decorum because she was exempt from the regulation

imposed upon Mughal society's elite women.

Sitting and Standing

Much of our view of mushaʿirah decorum hinges on a rather buttoned-up notion

of literary sociability. In the "Muslim social" films of 1950s India, and later in the 1980s

Ghalib serials, the courtly mushaʿirah is portrayed as a rather stultified affair with a brittle and uneasy mode of comportment that relied up on the complete controlled mastery of stoicism. Tazkirah writers also plainly value being *mauzūn* or appropriate. However, tazkirahs descriptions of poets also describe and idealize the genuine warmth *majlis*-based comportment engendered. To be a good entertainer of friends or *yār-bāsh* and to keep engaging conversation or *garm sohbat* were values that kept mushaʿirahs going, not just *mauzūnīyat* which could be questioned or torn down at a moment's notice. Poets had to be masters of humor and wit to make sagacious comments about each other, their patrons, other participants' verses, and all manner of topics that might arise while keeping up the flow of regular and entertaining conversation and poetry recitation going.

One Lahori poet named Bekhud, who had been employed as a servant of Jaʿfar Khan, had no place to sit in the *majlis* so he said this verse.

همین طاعت حق نماز است در وی
گهی بنده استد گه از پا نشیند
بود طاعت فرض همچون نمازم
بفرمای این بنده را تا نشید

For him who has obedience to the right to pray,
Sometimes he stands and sometimes he kneels.
Since I obey my duties to prayer,
Please grant permission so that this poor guy might sit down.

Since it was such a witty rejoinder, Jaʿfar Khan allowed him to join the circle and the others made room.

The politics of seating was an important dynamic in the mushaʿirah of which its attendees were well aware. Bindraban Das Khushgu recorded an anecdote about the 16th-century poets Halali and Nargisi. When both poets came into a gathering, Halali quickly went to the front the circle and sat next to the head convener or *sadr*. Nargisi was very jealous that Halali took such a choice spot and recited this verse to show his displeasure:

<div dir="rtl">

ناکسی گر از کسی بالا نشیند عیب نیست
روی دریا پر خس و دامان دریا گوهر است

</div>

Is it not a sin to be uncouth to someone while sitting in the place of honor?
The open water is mean and torrential, the waters' skirt is where you find the jewels.

Halali quickly responded:

There are three reasons why I sit in the place of honor and not you. One: Your pen name is Nargisi (narcissus) and my name is Halali (the crescent moon). The narcissus sits in the dirt and the moon is high up in the sky. Two: the narcissus is a symbol for the eye and the crescent moon references the eyebrow, which sits above the eye. Third: Nargis is a woman's name and Halal is a man's and we all know that a man is always above a woman. (Bindraban Das Khushgu 1959: 789)

234

In Farhut Allah Beg's novella *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shamaʿ*, editions come with a map of the

imaginary mushaʿirah which shows where the poets sat (1986: 93). As Ghalib and Zauq

were the most senior poets, they sat at the equivalent of 12 o'clock in the circle. Their

position would have been as *bālā nashīnān* in the "seats of honor." Between them sat

Mirza Fath al-Mulk Bahadur, the crown prince also known as Mirza Fakhru

(1816/18-1856), who was the patron of the event or *sadr*. Halali made a dash for this

select position in a seat of honor next to the *sadr* which plainly Nargisi resented.

Bekhud and Nargisi's verses construct and narrate the mushaʿirah, forming

further instances of verses yet again calling attention to their own recitation and

context. The poet Bekhabar once recited a verse which also does this, referencing the

seating politics in the mushaʿirah space.

<div dir="rtl">

بلند افتد چو مقطع پست سازد حسن مطلع را
کشد پائین محفل قدر من بالا نشینان را

</div>

As the *maqtaʿ* grows, the beauty of the *matlaʿ* is rendered inferior.
At the *mahfil*, my greatness pulled the rug out from under the high ranking
attendees.

Bekhabar's verse is so delectable that it has the ability to tear the *bālā nashīnān,* the

honored guests or dignitaries of the mushaʿirah , out from their choice spots in the

gathering circle. Nargisi would have probably rather recited Bekhabar's verse to Halali

for commandeering a spot he would have like to occupy (Khushgu 2010: 789).

In another instance, a fellow participant's seating position led a poet to compose

a verse calling attention to this transgression of *majlis* conduct. The poet Hakim Mirza

Muhammad Niˁmat Khan ˁAla (d. 1711/12) was at a mushaˁirah when his host turned his

back and began talking with someone else. ˁAla got very angry, and rather than recite

his comment, he called for his pen box and wrote a quatrain. Then he got up off the

cushions in the gathering and said, "I'm going home, but I have written something."[88]

The attendees looked at the slip of paper he left as he walked out of the mushaˁirah:

<div dir="rtl">

عالی ز غمت اشک نریزد چه کند
وز همچو تو شوخی نگریزد چه کند
پیر است و تو می کنی کفل جانب او
انصاف بده که بر نخیزد چه کند

</div>

> Oh ˁAla, there are no tears in shed for you in sadness. What to do?
> And he does not runaway from a flirt like you. What to do?

---

[88] Niˁmat Khan ˁAla, or Danishmand Khan as he was also known, was famous for his satires and
lampoons. During the 1678 siege of Hyderabad, there was a famine in the army and the price of grain rose
steeply. Supposedly, ˁAla composed this verse about the famine commenting on the appearance of certain
grains (ibid.: 59):

<div dir="rtl">

پیداست که شد غله ازین لشکر گم
گشتند ز جان سیر تمام مردم
افتاده زن و مرد چو خرمن برهم
کیر است جو و خایه نخود کس گندم

</div>

It is evident that there is a shortage of grain in the army.
People are turning weary of life.
Now grain is one on top of the other like man and wife.
Barley is like a cock, the balls are like peas, and wheat is a cunt.

> He is an old man and yet you turn your rump in his direction.
> Give him some justice so that he doesn't get up. What to do? (Ibid.: 443)

It would have been noticeable for someone with ʿAla's status to simply walk out without reciting his verse, an obvious slight in a context where vocal participation would have been a mark of good manners and amiability. Instead of reciting his verse, the preferred mode of poetic circulation, his leaves a scrap behind. It was a way for him to snub the gathering by implying they were not worthy of hearing his verse since the host turned his back on him and began talking to someone else perhaps while another recitation was going on.

Like many of the anecdotes discussed so far, the rude behavior was a violation of the poet's justice. ʿAla knew his place in the mushaʿirah as a *pīr* or revered elder which would have definitely made him a *bālā nashīn* in his own right. To turn your back on such a dignitary violates cultural norms which dictate always keeping your better side forward. What would have been the point of voicing his frustration? Instead he snidely leaves behind evidence of poetic ability which someone else must have read aloud causing the other attendees to note the poet's absence in embarrassment.

These protocols on comportment are further evidence of the way mushaʿirah sociability actualizes or materializes literature into the physical realm. Like the *ham-*

tarh verses seen in the preceding chapter in which poets stood on the same ground, so to speak, the musha'irah materializes this literary tendency through hierarchical and playful modes of comportment that are structured by verse.

Unruly Tongues

Literature lived on people's tongues and the musha'irah seemed to be a space that allows for these tongues to lash out of control. For instance, the nephew of the famous *tāzah-go'ī* poet Jalal Asir was known to have read lampoons at the *majlis,* a practice that was probably frowned upon but relished when it did happen.

At its end of the 16th century, just before the first Islamic millennium, Safavid court poets often engaged in writing invectives about each other. Hakim Shifa'i (d. 1627) was particularly infamous for contesting his colleagues and then lampooning them with biting verse. Azad Bilgrami notes:

> In those blessed days Hakim Shifa'i happened to visit Herat, was given the opportunity to meet with Mirza Fasihi in the court of Hasan Khan, and contested him in a musha'irah--the Khan had taken Fasihi's side, but Shifa'i having come up to Herat lampooned Fasihi anyway (*fasīhī rā havj kard*). Fasihi had employed some high-spiritedness concerning Shifa'i's dīwān and was by no means inclined to answer. The *hajv* of Fasihi was in Shifa'i's *dīwān*, but it was felt that it would be inappropriate for the tip of the pen to introduce [the composition] into words. (Bilgrami 1913: 50, 47)

Luckily, Bindraban Das Khushgu introduces the line in his tazkirah with a warning that

the full composition has been "restrained,"[89] and gives us a taste:

زمهریر کره ارض فصیحی که بود
خنک و بی‌مزه چون بوسهٔ بعد از انزال

It was Fasihi's frigid blast of air around the globe,
That was cold and lifeless like a kiss after ejaculating. (Khushgu 2010: 360, 518)

Azad's reluctance to record the missive illustrates the mushaʿirah's ambivalent

relationship with bawdy humor. Clearly, the anecdote was something that propelled a

poet like Shifaʾi into readers' imaginations as they heard the lore about his antics.

Khushgu's decision to record the verse shows that tazkirah writers were willing to

present verse that may have been frowned upon, but was still allowable if it was recited

to everyone's delight.

Additionally, there were some poets who seemed to capitalize off of composing

nonsense verse. Utakkarlais, whose verse will be discussed in the next chapter, was

famous for throwing together strings of words from all kinds of language that he could

never recall if prompted (Hasan 1940: 23). The famously obscene and creative poet

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[89] Sadly, the rest of the lampoon does not seen to have made it into the print edition available in US libraries (Sharf al-din Hasan Hakim Shifaʾi 1983).

Jaʿfar Zatalli (1658?-1713) used a term for "babbler" as his pen name. Two anecdotes about him hint at a mushaʿirah setting where Zatalli comes to Bedil's house in Guzar Ghat one evening to read a *masnawī* that he had written in praise of the poet-saint.

چہ عرفی چہ فیضی بہ پیش تو پھس

What is ʿUrfi, and what is Faizi before you? A muffled fart. (trans Faruqi 2008)

He only reads the first line when Bedil stops him and says, "Oh you've really honored me in coming here. But your humble Bedil is not worthy to hear epic poems usually reserved for the only the true masters" (Khushgu 2010: 113). Bedil gave Zatalli two coins from his purse for writing the poem and didn't say another word. Bindraban Das Khushgu witnessed the interaction, saying, "Several of the gathering members, and especially me, made it known that if Bedil had been compelled to read the verse's second line, well-knowing what the rhyme would be, people would have been delighted, but he refused" (ibid.) Since the first line ends with *phus*, an onomatopoetic word, the second line would have most likely ended in *kus* meaning "cunt." Even though Khushgu presents this as an example of Bedil's *ghayūr* or gravitas, his narrative appears to have an ulterior goal as well: he points out, though in a veiled fashion, that the rhyme to the first line must have been *kus* and that actually the listeners wanted to hear a bawdy,

240

humorous line. While Bedil's honor was preserved in the telling, Khushgu rends a tear in the veil of tazkirah representation to show us the mushaʿirah's levity (see Faruqi 2008 for a similar point).[90]

In another anecdote recorded by Khushgu, picked up later by Mir Hasan in *Shuʿarā-yi Hindī,* and recently discussed by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, Bedil is stumped on a particular line:

<div dir="rtl">

لاله به سینه داغ چون دارد

</div>

Why does the tulip have a scar on his chest?

Zatalli, who happened to be visiting the poet-saint at his Guzar Ghat home, rejoined in perfect rhyme and meter:

<div dir="rtl">

چوبکی سبز زیر کون دارد

</div>

Because he has a green pole up his ass. (trans Faruqi 2008)

Writers like Zatalli play off of interesting and impromptu lyrical and linguistic tensions in the recitational setting of mushaʿirah-based literary salons; in part this comes from poets being fundamentally interested in the sensual playful aspects of literary exchange the mushaʿirah encourages. The singing and the cursing rely on a

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[90] Ghulam Husain Shorish also cites an abbreviated version of this anecdote in his tazkirah (1984: 279).

heterogenous spectrum of vocal delight, slip-ups and jokes that are in fact embodied in India's Persophone public culture.

But these unruly tongues had their limits. Afzal Sarkhush seems to have picked up some of this playfulness in his own literary career and was known to cause discord with his unrestrained utterances. As we know, Sarkhush associated with Bedil and Gulshan, even claiming that Gulshan took instruction from him for a time before joining with Bedil in the end (Muhammad Afzal Sarkhush 2010). It seems their association paused for a time when Sarkhush audaciously recited this quatrain to Gulshan:

<div dir="rtl">

چاراند ز تحقیق کماهی آگاه
ابن عربی اول شان در افواه
پس مولوی و سحابی و ملا شاه
پنجم سرخوش غریب الله الله

</div>

As it is, there are four verified wise men,
Ibn 'Arabi is the first of them, so it's rumored.
After that it's Rumi, Sahabi Astarabadi, and M Allah Shah[91]
The fifth, by God, by God, is the singular Sarkhush. (Khushgu 1959: 72)

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[91] Sahabi Astarbadi (d. 1601-2) was a 16th century Persian poet famous for his mystical poetry (Rahman, Munir) M Allah Shah Badakhshi (d. 1661) was a leader of a Qadri Sufi order based in Lahore. His teacher was Miyan Mir 'Arif (d. 1635) and he had connections with the Mughal court through the princess Jahan Ara and her brother Dara Shikoh.

"We five are all sages," Sarkhush, jokingly said to Gulshan. "I suppose there could be others—Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki and Nizam al-Din Auliya, for instance. The rest were not sages but ascetics" (*zāhid*) (ibid.). Gulshan gave him a stern response, "Now this pridefulness that I hear from you is quite tasteless and while I would normally ignore it, you've really gone down a bad road now" (*amā al-ḥāl rāh-yi āsmān giriftīd*). Angrily turning to go, he continued, "You and I are not going to meet up for some time." Thereafter, he ceased coming by Sarkhush's house in Chowk Saʿd Allah Khan altogether. After a few days Sarkhush went to Gulshan's friends and asked, "Would it be possible to meet with Gulshan sometime?" Continuing, he explained, "I read him a verse that he didn't like and now he's ended our meetings, [saying, 'you've really gone down a bad road now.'] Would you all be arbitrators for me? Suppose, I might have been rude. I know. But guys, what other *road* would there have been to make Gulshan unhappy?" (Ibid.: 73). Gulshan heard Sarkhush's joke and his anger dissipated. Afterwards, Gulshan brought him this wine-themed verse:

<div dir="rtl">

به یک پیمانه چون یاقوت دارم آب و آتش را
</div>

Like a ruby, I have fire and water in one cup

To which Sarkhush fittingly responded, as if alluding to their previous tensions:

<div dir="rtl">

ز بس با نرم خویی رام کردم طبع سرکش را
</div>

243

With but a soft touch, I tamed [my] refractory nature. (Arzu 2005: 676)[92]

One of Sarkhush's contemporaries with a similarly recalcitrant nature was his friend and literary companion Nasir ʿAli Sirhindi (1638-1697). Nasir ʿAli had a reputation for being a drunkard, and like most poets, he renounced alcohol late in life after pledging to the Sufi order to which Gulshan also belonged: the Naqshbandi brotherhood (Muhammad Qudrat Allah Gapamawi 2008: 520).[93] Prior to his rush of piety, Nasir ʿAli was known to pay little heed to what others thought of him and was "an enemy to the blandishments of high society's doormen" (*be parwah az nāz-i nigahdār-i daulatmand dushman bud*). Once, upon receiving a rich gift from an upstart general in Aurangzeb's army, Zulfiqar Khan Nasrat Jang, Nasir ʿAli threw fistfuls of gold to people from atop a elephant the nawab had given as part of the reward, and when the riches ran out he traded his robe of honor (*khilat*) to a local merchant for a bottle of wine and some goblets.

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[92] Sarkhush kept up his antics to the end. As if daring God to damn him to hell, he wanted the following quatrain stitched on to his funeral shroud so God would see it when He woke Sarkhush from the grave:

Oh Sarkhush, the work of God is delightful and kind	سرخوش کار اله لطف و کرم است
There is so much sadness from sin and evil deeds	از معصیت و سیاه کاری چه غم است
See the flash of lightening and the shower of joy	رخشیدن برق بین و خوش باران
There is so much forgiveness and there is so little furor (Khushgu 1959: 71)	رحمت چه فزون غضب چه بسیار کم است

[93] Other examples are Bedil, Hatim, and Taban. In the case of Taban he renounced drinking when it was too late and it probably contributed to his early death (see Khushgu 1959: 109).

Shah Gulshan, on the other hand, disapproved of Nasir ʿAli's habits. In one anecdote Shah Gulshan was struck by a fit of poetic inspiration on the road between Lahore and Delhi. Stopping the caravan, he sat in the shade of a tree, vowing to sit there until his composition was finished. Nasir ʿAli also must have been in the caravan, for it is reported that he went over to Gulshan and embraced him so closely that their chests rubbed together, urging him to keep the caravan going. "You are so far away," he said, "I myself have become quite weak and am making preparations for my final voyage" (*safar-i vāpasīn*) (Khushgu 1959: 166; see Pellò 2009).

Perhaps on account of Nasir ʿAli tendency "to run off at the mouth," in Bindraban Das Khushgu's words, Gulshan gossiped about a time "an old acquaintance of his went to visit him, accompanied by a boy. [Nasir ʿAli] looked at the handsome youth and said, 'Is there a way for me to bite your lips?' His guest got offended and left. The day after [Nasir ʿAli] apologized, sending him a line by Mirza Saʾib" (Khushgu 2010: 2; trans. Pellò 2009: 10). Nasir ʿAli's poetic apology through Saʾib's verse appears very ambiguous. It would seem he still wanted to bite the young man's lips:

<div dir="rtl">

به اندک روی گرمی پشت بر گل می کند شبنم
چرا در آشنائی این قدر کس بیوفا باشد

</div>

Dew drops make the rose look slightly entreating.

245

In friendship why would someone be this faithless?[94]

Khushgu, who was close with Gulshan, seemed to be swayed by the Sufi's opinion;
writing about Nasir ʿAli, Khushgu tells us that, "he generally had rough manners with
people, in fact he even used to insult them" (*aksar bah mardum ba sakht rūʾī pesh mī āmad
balkeh dushnām mī dād*) (Ibid.; translation Pellò 2009). On one occasion Nasir got his
comeuppance. In a mushaʿirah he happened to be at, one of his lines was brought up:

چیزی که نادیدنی است آن هم مائیم

A thing which is not seen, I too am that.

Right to Nasir ʿAli's face the rakish poet Muhammd Sana Khan Wahshat (d. app
1727/37) said, "'Something not seen'? Doesn't that mean women's private parts (ʿosw-i
makhsūs-i zanān)? The good sir clearly means that he is that too!" (Ibid.: 205).[95]

The tazkirahs paint a picture where decorum is somewhat flexible for
mushaʿirah participants. There are norms for decorum which can be violated with

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[94] In Stefano Pellò's paper, only the anecdote it presented without quoting the enticing couplet from
Saʾib (2009). Avoiding the verse restrains the intertextual relationship between the narrative and the
verse. The couplet adds the lyrical element to the interchange Khushgu wanted to impart to his readers
who would have known about Nasir's intimacy with Saʾib's verse and then seen that the poet was not
really apologizing at all.

[95] Mir Taqi Mir has several tales about Nasir ʿAli. See Mir (1999: 138). Wahshat was also friends with
Khushgu and when the Hindu poet tried to get Wahshat to come to his gatherings he teasingly said that
his money would be better spent on buying whores and alcohol (*sharāb wa shāhdat*) for him (Khushgu
1959: 278). It should be noted that Wahshat was good friends with Nasir ʿAli and admired his poetry even
more than he admired the poetry Bedil who, by his estimation, was only half as good (ibid.).

impunity only if done with humor and humility. In Lahore during the 1690s it appears that some of the local Hindu merchant class was also enjoying Persian poetry together in mushaʿirah recitations. From *Mardum-i Didah*, ʿAbd al-Hakim Hakim noted a story from his contemporary Muhammad ʿAli Raʾij of Sialkot (1637/8?-1737/8):

> A few years prior, Raʾij happened to visit the house of Mir Jamal al-Din and Sayyid Fakhr al-Din Muhammad Husain—noted men and Sayyids of repute amongst the great people of Lahore. That other community (*jamāʿat-i dīgar*) from among the worthies of literature were already having a warm gathering of tumultuous literary exchange.
> A simpleton among the crowd addressed Mir Fakhr al-Din and asked him his name.
> He said, "Sayyid Muhammad Fakhr al-Din Muhammad Husain."
> After a little while he asked again, "What might be your noble title?"
> The aforementioned Mir made plain that his name was Fakhr al-Din Muhammad Husain.
> Again, after a little while the man said, "I forgot it and would like to hear your blessed name."
> The mir said, "Fakhr al-Din Muhammad."
> After an uncomfortable moment, another time he begged the kindness.
> He said, "Fakhr al-Din."
> A moment hadn't even passed when when he stood and reported, "Forgive the impudence, but this time I will hear your name or otherwise I dare not ask it again."
> He said, "Fakhr!"
> The simpleton salaamed and sat down.
> At any rate, the *majlis* closed and the people said their goodbyes. Turning to Fakhr al-Din, [the Hindu] said, "Live long, Lala Jivanmal, sir!" All the men there keeled over in laughter and the said Fakhr al-Din turned in embarrassment. (Hakim Lahori 2011: 106)

The anecdote is funny, but from the reader's vantage, outside of late 17th-century mushaʿirah in Lahore, Hakim's telling renders the humor's specificity opaque. This member of the "other community," or *jamāʿt-i dīgar,* may have been using the mushaʿirah setting to make fun of his host's long name, which Fakhr al-Din kept shortening in their interchange. Of course, this Hindu simpleton (*sādat*) appears to either have had a short memory or was very hard of hearing even though Fakhr al-Din kept trying to make his name clearer by removing an aspect of his appellation at each response. In the end, it was perhaps comedic that a poet and patron with a clearly Muslim title would be misnamed as a Hindu.

One minor poet from this period who engaged in some mushaʿirah contests with his contemporaries was Shujaʿ Kashi from Kashan in present day Iran. According to Nasrabadi and Khushgu, Shujaʿ had a particular stutter on the word *bulbul* that the poet Haidar Muʿammaʾi incorporated into a chronogram (see Appendix J). The chronogram both eulogizes and pokes fun at Shujaʿ's speech impediment that would have been clearly noticeable in a recitational setting not to mention in his day-to-day speech. In this case the poem hints at the way poets and chroniclers of the time heard recited speech. Shujaʿ's stutter on the word *bulbul* (nightingale) turns it into *bulbulbul* or ni-

nightingale, with the mourners crying Shujaʿ's eulogy in the stutter that his contemporaries couldn't resist humoring. This detail becomes a meaningful and appropriate word in the ghazal lexicon ripe for all kinds of poetic explorations in a chronogram for a fellow poet.

The poem is a sketch that actually gives a clue about how people in literary circles closely tuned into the way poets recited. Mistakes, slips into regional accents, stutters, and not being able to say anything at all illustrate the small everyday recitational errors and stumbles that tazkirah writers add into their writings. The mushaʿirah was not an idealized realm of strict lyrical utterance, perfect rhyme and finally realized verse. It was a setting for poets who falter in the realm of perfect speech.

3.2 Verse over Personality

As we saw in the last chapter, the Persian émigré Hazin earned himself a bad name through rumored poor conduct in a mushaʿirah. It had gotten so heated that the quality of his verse seemed to matter little to the members of Arzu's camp

since it was trumped by his reputation. Interestingly, people came to visit him

constantly according to the tazkirah anecdotes. It appears they were going to see if he

had the bad attitude he was infamous for and to exchange some verse.

Around 1919 or so, a former courtier and *munshī* from the Benares princely state

named Ghulam Husain Khan Afaq wrote an engaging article where he presents some of

the goings-on in Hazin's Delhi musha'irah. As a contemporary tazkirah also noted,

when Hazin first came to Delhi, many of the city's greatest poets lined up to recite for

him so that he might correct their verse. Afaq does not name his sources, but on

account of his connection to the Benares court where Hazin was patronized in his later

years, Afaq may have had access to other sources and legends. He gives two instances

where a unnamed poet presents verse for his correction. In one interesting instance,

the poet uses a Hindi word in the Persian verse:

<div dir="rtl">
سیه چوڑی بدست آن نگار نازنین دیدم
بشاخ صندلی پیچیده مار عنبرین دیدم
</div>

I saw a black bangle on the wrist of that image of tenderness;
I saw an amber colored snake twisted around a sandalwood branch.

Hazin said, "why do you need such a long verse? Correct it to this instead:"

<div dir="rtl">
سیه چوڑی بادست آن نگاری
</div>

بشاخ صندلی پیچیده ماری

A black bangle on the wrist of that image of tenderness—
A snake twisted around a sandal wood branch...
(Khan 190?: 27)

On another occasion in an anecdote documented in Husain Azad's *Ab-i Haya't*

Rafiʿ Sauda dropped in on Hazin's gathering at the behest of his fellow literati. After

Sauda's arrival was announced, in his characteristically haughty manner Hazin said,

"What does this Sauda need, tell him to go to the yard to be pelted by dirt clods." Hazin

was riffing off of Sauda's pen name which means "maddened by love." The

paradigmatic Lover, Majnun, was pelted by children's stones and dirt clods after he

went crazy for his beloved Leila. Sauda politely explained that his pen name was Sauda

and he wasn't a deranged no-account as it might suggest, "I am simply here on account

of the master's compositions." So Hazin recited this verse for him:

تاثیر تو زِه کرد کمانی به کمینی
یک صید نیاسود زمانی به زمینی

Your mere impression readied an arrow on the bowstring in ambush.
For eons, this prey of yours has found no respite on the earth.

Sauda praised it and then recited his own verse in thematic response:

251

<div dir="rtl">

ناوک نے تیرے صید نہ چھوڑا زمانے میں

تڑپے ہے مرغ قبلہ نما آشیانے میں

</div>

> Your dart did note spare the prey of the world;
> Even the weathervane's bird thrashes in its nest.

Hazin was struck by Sauda's novel attempt to craft a new meaning and praised his accomplishment and then damned him with faint praise as one would expect from such an arrogant and pernicious ustad, saying, "you're not bad among doggerel-reciting poets of India!"(Muhammad Husain Azad 2006: 111).

When Hakim Lahori went to visit Hazin where he was staying in Benares, he could not remember his verses and forget his pocket diary or *bayāz* where he had sketched his compositions.

> In Benares, I had two occasions to meet with Sheikh Muhammad ʿAli Hazin, may God's peace be upon him. I found him to be a paragon of humanity. In the first interchange, I could recall nothing from my compositions. There was a difficulty in recitation. I said, "Right now, nothing comes to mind and I did bring the right diary." The time of departure concluded and he said, "Tomorrow morning will certainly come. When we share a spoon of lentils to eat, bring a section of your poems too." With those words, there arose a new possibility. On the second day I went with several new ghazals that I had copied and gave on to him. He studied [the verses] with such concentration he lost track of time. May his nail bed never close! He became very happy and showed his profuse admiration. (Hakim 2011: 98)

Hakim paints an ingratiating picture of Hazin; one in which the poet usually known for his dismissive attitude toward India and its writers takes on an understanding air in the face of Hakim not being able to recite a single verse. In spite of coming unprepared with no diary and perhaps freezing up in front of a famous poet, Hakim was inspired enough to craft some new poems during the night and to present them to Hazin at breakfast. Did Hakim stutter through a few initial lines or when he recited a line could he not remember the rejoinder? As we shall discuss, visiting Hazin became a trope for 18th-century anecdote-writers concerned with his and Arzu's literary feud. Even Bindraban Das Khushgu who was incredibly devoted to Arzu visited Hazin in Benares showered high words of praise on the Iranian in his *Safinah* (Khushgu 1959: 292).

Lachhmi Narayan Shafiq (d. 1808), a student of Azad Bilgrami, records an anecdote from the year 1745 when the poet Hadayat Allah Wahdat went to meet Hazin in Delhi while visiting from Aurangabad. He found Hazin being lavishly pampered in a large mansion with servants waiting on him hand and foot. He told Hazin's servant to tell the poet a "dervish from the South" was there to see him. Hazin didn't move from his pillow and even remained sitting while they shook hands, eventually handing

253

Wahdat a pillow to sit on before asking him his particulars. Wahdat told Hazin that his

ustad back home, Muhammad Baqir Shahid, sent his salaam. Hazin seemed annoyed

that Shahid wasn't there himself to pay his respects and asked Wahdat where Shahid

was.

"In Aurangabad," said Wahdat.

 "Does he currently compose poetry?" asked Hazin.

"He does."

"Well, if you remember one of his verses recite it for me." Wahdat rattled off one

of his ustad's poems.

انا الحق گفتن منصور تاویل نمی خواهد
گدا گم می کند خود را چو دولت می کند پیدا

Mansur saying, "*anā al-haqq*,"[96] cannot be interpreted;
The beggar would lose himself as soon wealth appeared.

Hearing the line, Hazin, who was himself a dervish and of the dervish race (*darvīsh*

nizhād), Wahdat tells us, considered it for a moment then said, "Oh, I hadn't recognized

you," getting up to embrace Wahdat before sitting down and calling out to his servants

for some food to be brought (Lacchmi Narayan Shafiq 1977: 87-8).

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[96] The phrase references the Sufi Mansur al-Halaj (858-922) who said, "I am the Truth!" in a fit of mystic ecstasy. The religious authorities quickly hanged him for essentially claiming to be God.

Hazin's personal manners were infamous among mid-1700s literati and so-called polite society. His invectives against Kashmiris and India in general worried his contemporaries to a degree, but it appears Hazin's personal conduct in salons and impromtu meetings was of more interest to the many writers who chronicled their interactions with him. Yet, there is no reason to believe Hazin would not be familiar with the social norms of the time, but to this day his persona is still linked with generally rude behavior to other writers during his time in India. Hazin wrote in his autobiography *Tārīkh wa Safarnāmah-yi Hazīn* (*The History and Travelogue of Hazin*) of an instance where his elders encouraged him as a young boy to recite verse at a time when he would not have had any poetic stature of his own in Isfahan's local community of literati—this was before his family left for Lahijan some years later. A group of clerics (*ʿalamah-yi Majmaʿī*) had gathered in the house of Hazin's father when they requested the young Hazin to join the *majlis* (*dar ān majlis talabīdand*). They began discussing a line from Muhtashim Kashi (1528-1588) that someone had recited:

<div dir="rtl">

ای قامت بلند قدان در کمند تو

رعنائی   آفریدهٔ   قد بلند   تو

</div>

Oh, the height of even tall people gets caught in your snare;
[Your] beautiful figure is the creation of your high stature.

255

While the company found it pleasing, Hazin's father criticized it and stated that, "only the second line is correct; the first line does not gladden one's instincts," taking issue with the placement of the word *qāmat*, meaning stature or form. Hazin's father turned to him and gently coxed the boy poet to compose a verse in this form; "if you are able to compose a couplet to this ghazal, do so" (*agar tawānī dar īn ghazal baitī guft, bagū*) (1997: 192). Hazin tells us that a verse came to him and his father could tell by the look in his eyes. He implores Hazin to recite it before the group: "If you composed something, recite it and don't be shy" (*agar guftī bakhwān wa hijāb mī kun*) (ibid.). To everyone's surprise and pleasure, Hazin spontaneously composes an entire ghazal in Muhtashim's form and even trumps the elder poet, at least by his father's estimation.

صید از حرم کشد خم جعد بلند
فریاد از تطاول مشکین کمند تو

شد رشک طور از آمدنت کوی عاشقان
بنشین که باد خردهٔ جانها سپند تو

مشکل شدست کار دل از عشق خوشدلم
شاید رسد به خاطر مشکل پسند تو

The curl of [your] long tresses draws a net over exalted Mecca and Medina;

Alas, what dark musky tyranny is there in your lowly snare.[97]

Since your arrival, the lovers' alleys envy Mount Sinai;
Sit and may our insignificant lives be your burnt offerings.[98]

The heart's work has become difficult, because of love my heart is easy;
Contentious as you are, perhaps it [all] comes to pass for you.

Not long afterward Hazin fell off his horse and was confined to his bed for an extended period of time with a broken limb. He used his time wisely to compose more poetry.[99]

Hazin paints a scene where he was very successful at reciting a verse—as opposed to riding a horse—and also demonstrates the understanding and encouragement elder poets could show for young initiates. As we shall see, in other instances these older poets were often trying to get the novices into bed. In his previous years, Hazin had spent his time studying and imitating the master poets and was presumably very familiar with the lyrical conventions of literary Persian. The understanding and encouragement Hazin's father displayed clearly had an impact on

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[97] In this verse Hazin is playing with the idea that it was considered a crime to hunt for prey in the Hijaz or the land around Mecca and Medina—the two holiest cities in Islam.

[98] Esfand or wild rue is burned in Iran and India to ward off evil. A more direct but contorted translation would be: "Sit and burn our insignificant lives like wild rue to ward off evil."

[99] In the autobiography Hazins says that it was a *Sāqī-nāmah* or a genre which could be called "The Song of the Cupbearer." Hazin was clearly a young initiate into Persian lyrical conventions, but it humorous to imagine a 10 or 12 year-old child writing about the mystical and material attributes of alcohol.

the young poet and it would not be surprising that Hazin himself would later show the

same understanding and helpful attitude toward Hakim in Benares when the junior

writer froze up. Hazin's father was so pleased that he gave him his pen box and pen so

Hazin could then write down the completed poem. It's worth noting only after the

young poet composed his verse and uttered before his elders, did a pen, ink, and paper

even make an appearance. The *qalamdān* (pen box), *khāmah* (pen), and *bayāz* (diary) are

important, but they come later.

Keeping up with the Kashmiris

Visiting with Hazin, however, was not always such a pleasant experience—

especially not for Hazin. The poet ʿAbd al-Rahman Vizarat Khan's visit to Hazin around

1734 was quite memorable. Garami (d. 1743), as he was more commonly known, was an

eccentric Kashmiri poet who strutted around like a Hindu yogi in a red *lūngī*, and who

teased out his beard and spoke in a loud voice. Even with all this, he was most famous

for causing disturbances in gatherings with his strange behavior; some even accused

258

him of reciting others' verses as his own in mushaʿirahs. He was the son of ʿAbdul Ghani Beg Qabul (d. 1717/8 or 1728?),[100] a famous poet in Delhi during the late 1600s who was well connected with a large circle of his fellow Kashmiris living in the city. Qabul's literary lineage stretched back to the famous Mughal court poets of the late 1500s and early 1600s, through the Kashmiri poet Darab Joya Kashmiri (d. approx. 1690)[101] who hosted literary gatherings in Delhi for his Kashmiri students including Qabul (Joya had been in Lahore previously where he took part in the gatherings at the Wazir Khan mosque with Afrin, Nasir ʿAli, and Eʿjaz) (Khushgu 2010: 176). Garami kept this Kashmiri contingent connected through his large group of disciples who became an almost religious following. Even long after Garami passed away, his legends continued. Writing in the 1780s, Bhagwan Das Hindi referred to Garami as a "protector of the common people" (*muʿtaqad fiyah al-nās*); these same people who believed in him would say Garami could perform miracles. Among them were probably the four students that

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[100] Qabul's influence extended into Urdu circles as well. He wrote a verse or two in Urdu, and his students later took on pupils to instruct in crafting Urdu verse. ʿAbd al-Haʾi Taban, the beautiful young poet who would later drink himself to death, learned under Muhammad Ali Hashmat (d. app. early 1700s) who had been Qabul's pupil.

[101] Joya had a brother named Kamran Beg with the fittingly rhymed pen name goyā, who had gotten into a literary duel with the satirical Mughal poet Mulla Shaida. Shaida appreciated the young man's poetic promise and gave the poet his pen name, meaning "the speaker." Joyā means "the inquirer." Khushgu Tehran 600

Hindi lists in his tazkirah (1958: 37, 43, 137, 225). Bhagwan Das also heard many rumors from other "Delhi-ites" (*dihlū'iyān*) that Garami would ensnare people with his prudence (*husn-i tadbīr*) and good humor (*khush akhlāqī*) (ibid.: 165).

Hindi's teacher Bindraban Das Khushgu often saw Garami at musha'irahs, where he would read his verses aloud in such a strange manner that he would catch the ear of audience members (*sāma'ah bāz balkah mardamānī*) who had no ability in reciting verse. Dargah Quli Khan noted that Garami would recite his poems forcefully to the melodies used by Kashmiri singers. Additionally, Garami had such a high regard for his own poems that he would start arguments about "fresh-speaking" aesthetics to the point the veins would pop out his neck and the musha'irah would be taken beyond the bounds of even a debate (*musha'irah ra bah sarhad-i munazarah mi rasanad*) (1993: 155). Mir Taqi Mir even saw Garami at lively *Rekhtah* gathering, (*hangamah-i rekhtah garm shudah*) where he recited this Urdu ghazal he had composed:

<div dir="rtl">

حاضری بن محل نہیں کھاتا
بیگمی بے پنیر منعم کا

</div>

For breakfast, I wouldn't eat a widow's porridge.
A rich man's cheese is like a married lady. (1972: 29)

Delhi's literati tolerated Garami for Dargah Quli Khan notes that the other appropriate musha'irah participants (*mauzūnān*) would bear his outlandish sensibilities so as to

maintain decorum, obliging him with praise considering his advanced age around the

year 1739.

In 1734 Garami visited Hazin when the master poet first arrived in Delhi from

Iran—Hazin had gotten into some legal trouble with the Persian king Nadir Shah

because of his involvement with the assassination of an Iranian official. The Kashmiri

took on a host of young boys as his disciples and apprentices (five hundred by

Khushgu's count), so when he arrived at Hazin's lodging, Garami had a herd of followers

with him intent on reciting poetry together with this noted writer who had just come

from Safavid lands. In the "accustomed fashion of his father's *Qabulian* sect" (*marsum-i*

firqah-yi qabūlīah), Garami let out in a welcoming cry that "reached the dome of the

heavens." Poor Hazin quietly melted into a corner with a headache, but was compelled

to recite with Garami and his rabble anyway (*taklīf-i sukhan*). Arzu, who tells us this

whole story as he heard it from Garami's disciples, wrote that Hazin probably recited

with a sad voice due to Garami's bombastic ways (*hazīn bah āwāz-i hazīn khwānd)*. Arzu

didn't care much for Hazin and his verse, but he also found ᶜAbd al-Ghani Beg Qabul's

"Kashmiri contingent" as lead by Garami "indeed contrary" and contentious (*mukhālif*

tarz-o tūr-i firqah-i qabūlīah ast).[102] Either way, Arzu was keen to show an instance where

Hazin's manners got him into trouble with Delhi's locals over poetry recitation,

something for which this Iranian on the lam from Nadir Shah seemed to have a special

talent. This visit may have prompted Hazin to write a lampoon on the ridiculousness of

Kashmiris.[103]

    On another occasion Bhagwan Das Hindi relates an anecdote about two other

young poets visiting Hazin to recite their verse. His friend and fellow secretary

Muhammad Sadiq Sukhanwar (c. 1750s?) told Hindi that he and another poet named

Nizam al-Din Ahmad Sanaʿ (1726-?) left the village of Bilgram, from which they came,

for Benares to meet with Hazin who had recently moved there. Both Sanaʿ and

Sukhanwar learned Persian under the same teacher Nawazish ʿAli in the early 1700s

(Bilgrami 1913: 348-9; Hindi 1958: 103-4; ʿAshiqi 2012: 897). Hazin was propped up,

reclining on his cot when the two poets arrived. Turning to them, Hazin gestured for

his visitors to recite some poems. Sanaʿ chose this verse:

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[102] Another thing about Garami is that he was perhaps capitalizing on his father's fame. Ghani Qabul was connected with the Kashmiri poets Joya and Goya who had also maintained gatherings for Delhi's Kashmiris during the mid-1600s.

[103]
So that another world-debasing Kashmiri is not born,
Oh Satan you bachelor, if only this _____ would be barren! (Naushahi 2005: 34)

تا نمی زاد به دنیای دنی کشمیری
کاش این ..... سترون بدی ابلیس عزب

262

<div dir="rtl">

داد از دلِ دردکیشِ ما را

نگذاشت به حالِ خویشِ ما را

</div>

> There is a cry from this pain-worshiping heart of mine;
> Even now, it has not forsaken me.[104]

Hazin liked the poem and had Sukhanwar recite the same verse. Sukhanwar in his recitation left out an *izāfat,* a genitive particle linking nouns, gerunds, and adjectives. Hazin tells Sukhanwar, "Cutting the izafat is not correct" (*fakk-i izāfat durust nīst*) (Hindi 1958: 104). To this, Sukhanwar responded that there must be examples of this construction in the masters' compositions.

Now something curious happens. Hazin smiled and said, "Ah, you must be one of the people near to Siraj al-Din Khan-i Arzu."

"I am one his most insignificant disciples," Sukhanwar admitted.

At this point Hazin appears to slight Sukhanwar with the vague comment, "You are every kind of godsend from the cultivated classes of India" (*mauzūnān-i hind*). And Sukhanwar seems to notice this disguised invective, stating Hazin was inwardly displeased (*ba-bātin rāzī nashud*).

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[104] Hindi does not record this second verse in his *Safīnah.* ᶜAshiqi presents both verses in *Nishtar-i ᶜIshq.*

<div dir="rtl">

در عشق دو چیز ساخت رسوا

صبر کم و درد بیش ما را

</div>

> In love, ignominy has been made into two parts
> It seems to me, patience is lesser and pain is greater

The term *fakk-i izāfat* refers to two types of grammatical occurrences in Persian

and sometimes found in certain stock Persian phrases deployed in Urdu. In one sense it

can refer to using the direct object marker *rā* to join a string of nouns as in this example

from Hafiz where we find a *fakk-i izāfat* in the second line:

یاد باد آن که سر کوی توام منزل بود
دیده را روشنی از نور رُخَت حاصل بود

Because of memory of the wind, the head of your alley, to me, was the
destination
The luminosity of sight got its marching orders from brilliance.

The underlined portion without the direct object marker *rā* could be written as *roshinī-*

yi dīdah instead of *dīdah rā roshīni.* In both instances the meaning is the same.

In Hindi's example, Sukhanwar employed the second type of *fakk-i izāfat.* Instead

of reading the phrase *dil-i dardkesh* with the *izāfat*, he recited it as *dil-dardkesh*, omitting

the genitive particle. In both forms the phrase means the same thing: a pain-

worshipping heart or a heart that makes pain its religion.

The specificity of this example is intriguing and gives us a window into how

people listened and recited texts in the mushaʿirah's semi-formal setting. Hazin's

objection to Sukhanwar dropping the *izāfat* perhaps had to with what he saw has

improper Indian innovations in Persian. Arzu on the other hand prized Indians'

264

"vernacular" approach to Persian in that there was no such thing as a native speaker of Persian given that it was not a "native" language for many parts of Iran let alone India. The literary register is something that anyone has to learn. In fact, Indians actually in some instances knew it better than the people of Iran because they actively and intellectually adopted and redeployed idiomatic Persian in their everyday literary lives. This anecdote has Hazin relaxing on a *chārpāʾī* or cot, perhaps smoking a hookah in his leisure clothes. He is visited by two young students of poetry seeking his approval and tutelage for their verse. As was the custom, Hazin has them recite their verses to him and from the poet's view Sukhanwar's simple act of leaving out an *izāfat* betrays his literary allegiance. In the end, Sukhanwar does tell Hazin that he was in fact a student of Arzu. This anecdote leaves a lot of questions. One, why did Hazin have Sukhanwar repeat the line? And why didn't Sukhanwar recite the line with the same *izāfat* as Sanaʿ did? It could be simply that Sukhanwar was attempting to negate Hazin's point by appealing to tradition.[105] Yet, this was not necessarily a defense particular to Arzu as we see many others used this as well. Judging from anecdotes in tazkirahs covering Urdu

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[105] personal communication from Arthur Dudney

literature, accusing other poets of cutting *izāfat* became a way of diminishing

competitors in a mushaʿirah setting.

Arzu and the Enjoyment of Discord

Arzu too was keen to understand how verse was to be recited given the larger

debates on Indian and Iranian ties to Persian literature. Mughal poet Mir Yahya Kashi

came to India during the reign of Shahjahan (r. 1628-1658) and worked as a panegyrist

for the emperor's son Dara Shikoh (1615-1659). Arzu cites a portion of Yahya's *masnawī*

on being from the city of Kashan in Iran to illustrate the effect of regional accent on

how listeners perceive poetic meaning. He brings this point up in the context of

regional antipathies within Iran—a subject with interesting parallels to contemporary

18th-century debates on Persian linguistic usage in India (see Appendix K).

As the poem states, where the letters *alif* and *nūn* are joined, Kashanians read

the "*ān*" as "*ūn*." For Arzu this is a curious problem on two fronts. One, is that he was

very interested in regional alliances to Persian language because at the time some poets

accused Indian and other *tāzah-goʾi* writers of incorrectly employing sayings and

mangling idiomatic, day-to-day speech in their Persian verse, a point Arzu was

attempting to refute in his writings. On the other hand, there is a peculiarity in regional

accents that would have an effect on how poems are understood which seems to

concern Arzu in this anecdote at first. While Yahya makes fun of Kashan-folks' speech,

Arzu writes that all the people of *ʿIrāq al-ʿAjam* talk this way and gives an interesting

example in verse:

<div dir="rtl">

کار معجون کمانی می کند پیکان او

</div>

> The tip of his arrow does the work of an bowed electuary.

In the above example there strange occurrence with the word *kamāni* (curved or like a

bow) that would only be apparent in the recitational setting because of the difference

in accent. Arzu writes that with the Western Iranian accent *kaman* would be understood

as *kammūn* or cumin, changing the poem's novel ideational construction of with bow-

like medicinal paste or bow grease into an electuary paste mixed with cumin. In some

ways both could work, but as Arzu notes, the *paikān,* or arrowhead of the Lover, has to

be delivered by a bow; thus *kamān* or bow would be the basis for the verse's enjoyment

(*bunyād-i lutf-i shiʿr).* Even though the Beloved would be loosing arrows with bad intent,

for the Lover they would be like medicine in that the sharpness of the arrowhead would

disguise the intent of the Beloved: death is sweet for a tortured Lover. Thus Arzu's point

267

is that the accent leads people to misunderstand the more delightful thrust of the poem which plays on the word *maʿjun-i kammūnī*, but must be understood as *maʿjun-i kamānī.* Though perhaps trivial at first glance, the discussion makes it very clear how the Indian mushaʿirah audience heard verse during the 1700s: it was not according to tendencies of the Western Iranian accent. Furthermore, it does show the tip of a perhaps larger discussion going at the time about the regional relationship between recitation and *mazmūn āfrīnī* or casting themes. While the Western Iranian accent may hinder the understanding of meaning in some cases, it in no way hampers the delight recitation could produce.

By quoting Yahya's verses, Arzu makes the point that regional antipathies are the real culprits behind accusations of poor poetic comprehension or composition even in light of varying accents. Yahya Kashi's people were originally from Shiraz, but Yahya's father adopted Kashan as the family home before Yahya was born. Given the general disgust the people of Shiraz had for Kashanis—and everyone else for that matter—Yahya felt betrayed and wished he had been born in Shiraz where his ancestors were from. In a *masnawī*, he writes:

<div dir="rtl">

پدرم این خطا را عرفان کرد

</div>

268

كه از شيراز جا به كاشان كرد

روح من زان بلند پرواز است

گلم از خاک شيراز است

ليک كاشانه‌ام به كاشان است

اين كه گاهی گزيده‌ام زان است

My "learned" father made a mistake,
When he switched his place from Shiraz to Kashan.
My soul is from that high-flying place,
But my dust is from the clay of Kashan.
However, my *kāshānah*[106] is at Kashan,
Although it happens to have been selected for me.

Arzu's point was that in fact that Yahya Kashi was really just another arrogant

poet from Shiraz; a place 17th-century poet the Central Asian, Safavid era poet Hakim

Shifaʾi goes so far as to call it an "ignorant abode of conceit"—Arzu was quoting this

(*dār al-gharūr-i nādānī*) (Nafais 2004: 1843). Actually, at the end of the poem Yahya

begrudgingly admits to kind of liking Kashan after all. Of course, Arzu makes this point

in light of the common conception that people said Isfahanians were 100 times better

than anyone from Shiraz. However, Arzu points out that Isfahanians thought the people

of Qazvin were foolish and stupid as well, citing an interchange in a coffeehouse where

17th-century poet Muhammad ʿAli Saʾib Tabrizi (1601-1677) upon seeing a Qazvinian

asked him, "does one find pimps in Qazvin?" The Qazvinian responded, "Why wouldn't

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[106] Yahya is playing with *Kāshān* the city as his *kāshānah* or "resting place."

you find them? Qazvin is a big city, but there are not so many that they would sit in

rows [like they do here in Isfahan's coffeehouses]" (Arzu 2005: 1844).[107]

Another famous antipathy that Arzu cites is that between the regions of

Khurasan and Khansar famously linked with two animals whose Persian terms rhyme

with the cities' names: the ass of Khurasan (*khar-i khurasān*) and the bear of Khansar

(*khars-i khwānsār*). In one of Isfahan's bazaars the poet Akhund Mulla Husain from

Khansar and a man from Khurasan happened to see an ass loaded with the body of a

bear that had recently been killed. To tease Mulla Husain, the man gestured to the

living "Khurasani" ass and the dead "Khansari" bear. Mulla Husain jested back with a

saying:

<div dir="rtl">

هنوز مردهٔ من زندهٔ ترا بار است

</div>

Now my dead body is a burden for your life.

Mir Taqi Mir has his own anecdote about the Western Iranian accent in his memoirs. It

too seems to relish the regional antipathies in social literary setting. It's also more to

the point. Safdar Muhammad Khan or Syed Muhammad Shustari, as he was also known,

was visiting Muhammad Shah (r. 1719-1748) when the emperor made a remark about

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[107] Mir Taqi Mir copies this anecdote into his tazkirah as well, but he does not relate it to the larger
commentary on parochialism as seen in Arzu's work see Mir (1999: 133).

how Iraqis —Safdar Muhammad was one of those—would butcher certain Persian words

in their pronunciation. To test him, the Shah recited this line by Saʿdi:

<div dir="rtl">ای مرغ سحر عشق ز پروانه بیاموز</div>

Oh dawn's bird, learn love from the moth.

Knowing that the emperor was trying to trip him up, Safdar responded in a thick

Western Iranian or ʿIrāq al-ʿAjamī accent: He pronounced the rejoinder as "kūn *sokhtah*

rā jūn *shud o āwāz nīyāmad*" instead of "kān *sokhtah rā* jān *shud o āwāz nīyāmad."* This

change in pronunciation turned Saʿdi's famous line "for he was burned to death and

didn't make a sound" into "the inflamed asshole turned red and didn't make a

sound" (Mir Muhammad Taqi Mir 1999: 137; see Naim 1999).[108]

It seems communal antipathies and alliances were also played out in the

mushaʿirah context. The final chapter of the dissertation documents how Bekhabar and

Bedil jousted with chronograms about the sectarian tensions implicitly stoking the Shiʿi

Syed Brothers blinding and assassinating the Mughal king Farrukh Siyar who was a

Sunni. It also appears that the "Qabuliyan sect" (*firqah-i qabūliyah*) was based on a

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[108] Saʿdi's line according to the joke:

<div dir="rtl">ای مرغ سحر عشق ز پروانه بیاموز
کون سوخته را جون شد و آواز نیامد</div>

271

shared Kashmiri alliance first formed between the brothers Joya and Goya and careered

on through Qabul and his son Garami. What we see from this is that commonplace

regional antipathies are, in fact, a humorous, infectious, and normal addition to literary

communities.

Arzu's idea in the story of the ass of Khurasan and the bear of Khansar is one

that we ought to take to heart: regional antipathies and sectarian difference are the

norm even in literary settings, reflecting a complex, socially imbricated notion of

Persian and Urdu early literary life. They are not reflective of larger nationalist notions

of literary belonging nor are they indicative of the ideology behind aesthetic regimes.

Accent and stupidity can be made fun of in the mushaʿirah setting, but poets display

their rhetorical acumen by capitalizing off of their languages' linguist cracks in

addition to their peers human frailty. While the recitational aspect must be taken into

account, Arzu and Mir's anecdotes and explanations show a highly contradictory and

heterogenous social life that found its way into the humorous and evocative literature

of the time. As I have hinted at in other sections, the 18th-century's mushaʿirah setting

illustrates an important linguistic and literary shift that was well underway by the time

Sukhanwar and Sanaʿ ventured to Hazin's dwelling in Benares. The tazkirah tradition

chronicles a portion of Mughal and Safavid society in various states of literacy bound together in the poetry economy of the time through mutual enjoyment and criticism of Persian and later Urdu literature. Here, Carla Petievich's work on the misguided notion of regional antipathy between Lucknow and Delhi is instructive for analyzing Arzu's remarks in that Petievich points to how literary societies function according to far more dynamic relations than the 19th-century's critics were able to admit (Petievich 1992). Thus, we shouldn't let our view of literary transmission and the sensory life of 18th-century poetic discourse suffer like the poor ass of Khurasan with a dead literary giant on its back. The stuttering, yelling, mumbling, and mispronunciation of poems in highly informal settings shows the wider oral circulation of poetic knowledge.

Since the literary and the cultural realms are not bifurcated in 1700s India, the literary and the social realm are mutually constitutive. Additionally, I don't take Arzu's invocation of these humorous anecdotes as a criticism of the social realm of literature at all. Arzu is quite secular in his invocation of parochialism showing how different cities in even Iran would look down on each other for arbitrary reasons; given the narrative voice of tazkirah anecdotes and my larger argument for a poetics in tazkirah-based historiography, we find that Arzu revels in this mode of humor. In the Indian

273

context, previous writers have pointed to the introduction of certain Indic imagery into

Persian literary tropes and others have clearly shown the widespread use of Persian as a

unifying literary register between the court and the street (Yarshater 1974, 1986;

Losensky 1994; Bruijn 1997; Alam 1998; Dale 2003; Alam and Subrahmanyam 2006).

However, it is the circulation of Persian at a popular level within the heterogenous,

excessive, and aural realm of North India's mushaʿirah scene where we see it take on

the trappings of a popular literary register that prefigures Urdu poetic communities

(see Sharma 2009).

3.3 Chemical Sociability

<div dir="rtl">

ترنمشان خمار از گوش میبرد

یکی دل داد و دیگر هوش میبرد

</div>

Their singing in *tarannum* makes my ears drunk.
One already fell in love and the other shall pass out.

<div align="center">Nizami</div>

The increasing availability of narcotics, stimulants, and paper allowed for a

more relaxed incarnation of the *majlis* within the literary sphere. Hashish had long been

consumed in India and Iran as had various forms of alcohol, but in the early 1600s the

introduction of coffee and tobacco added another route to intoxication for *majlis*

participants (Rudolph P. Matthee 2005; Topik 2009; Withington 2011; Rudi Matthee

2014). The increased availability of intoxicants coupled with the vernacularization of Persian contributed to the leveling of the *majlis* social context outside of the imperial or regional courts. Additionally, the eventual emergence of Urdu as a semi-mass mediated vernacular with a Persophone literary register would eventually eclipse Persian. With bottle and *bayāz* in hand, amateur poets were now contenders in a complex literary economy that trafficked in verse and *tāzah-goʾi* stylistics as much as it did coffee, tobacco, opium, and wine. It is no coincidence that intoxicants would be part of the mushaʿirah's aural experience given medieval conceptions that sound's ability to create excessive states in people parallels the actual effects of drugs an idea we will address further in the last chapter.

Opium and Hashish

As we know from contemporary accounts, opium was available to the Mughal court from the beginning of the 1600s onward. The Mughal Emperor Jahangir consumed it from a special cup he had fashioned explicitly for drinking opium or *koknār*, a mixture made from poppy seeds. Additionally, the painting of ʿInayat Khan, one of Jahangir's courtiers, and the emperor's description make it clear the social role

of opium use in Mughal society (Smart 1999). Poets were also keen to take opium for the sociability it created. In late 1600s Isfahan, Tahir Nasrabadi notes at least two poets who drank opium. It seemed to make Mulla Makhfi Rasti (c. 1680s) the life of the party in spite of his weakened state (*zaʾīf*) and pitiable nature (*haqīr jassah*). One day his patron said to him, "if you persist with the *konkar* there will be nothing left of you." Makhfi responded, "Yes, but not from the effect of the opium. When anyone writes a personal letter, in the heading they write, 'Makhfi is no more.' But I'm the type of guy who remains standing no matter how much they curse me" (Nasrabdi 2000: 395).[109] The joke is a play on words with the letter-writing convention *makhfī na-mānad...* or "may it not be hidden..." which could also mean "Makhfi is no more." In turn, it makes all letter headings curses upon the poet for being a degenerate. Instead, opium and the world of letter writers' curses prolonged his life to enliven his patron's gatherings.

Tahir Nasrabadi himself was addicted to opium, a fact he admits in his tazkirah. After renouncing alcohol and other drugs, he held on to his opium addiction, but still missed the "alchemical happiness" the other intoxicants brought to him (Nasrabadi 2000: 669). Faqir Allah Afrin (1668-1741), Hakim Lahori's ustad, on account of visiting

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[109] Mir quotes a variation of this verse in his autobiography (1999: 134-5).

the tea houses and *koknār khānah-hā* (opium dens) of the Panjab was a regular opium

user and horribly sick when Walih Daghistani (1712-1756) went to visit him in Lahore a

few years before Afrin returned to Sialkot where he finally died (Walih 2005: 309-10;

Khushgu 1959: 239). In῾am Allah Khan Yaqin (1722-1755), who rose to fame in the

middle 1700s as an Urdu poet, only to be slandered by Mir Taqi Mir, as we saw in the last

chapter, was an opium eater according to a writer who met Yaqin in 1755/6, probably

months before he was killed by his father (Chaman 128: 163).[110] ῾Abd al-Ha'i Taban (d.

1749), another very talented and handsome young poet, died because of drinking too

much, but it was not from the opium mixture that addicted so many. He pickled his liver

with alcohol and even tried to renounce it when it appeared he would die of its

indulgence, but his last minute piety probably only worsened his condition before he

ultimately died (Hasan 1940: 35).

Bhagwan Das Hindi mentions two opium addicts: Pinaki was a commoner and on

account of his addiction chose to use the word for an opium eater as his pen name—

pīnakī refers to the particular form of drowsiness induced by taking opium, even going

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[110] Yaqin will be discussed more in the last chapter, but it's worth noting that many tazkirah writers allude to Yaqin's father, a nawab appointed during Aurangzeb's reign (1658-1707) named Azharuddin Khan, killing him for having an affair with another man. Supposedly Azhar tried to dispose of Yaqin's body by sinking it in the Yamuna River. On account of his poetic ability, fame, and good looks several tazkirah writers decried the whole affair as the "slaughter of Jacob" (*maqtūl-i ya'qūb*). CITE

so far as to write a *masnawī* describing opium (*taryāk*). Hindi records two ending verses

from the poet.[111] The other was Muhammad Hasrat, an attendee as the Imam Riza

shrine in Mashahd (Hindi 1958: 37-38, 56) though it's curious how Hindi would have

information on Hasrat other than from perhaps word of mouth from other poets.

Hasrat is not mentioned in Iranian tazkirahs that I have seen.

Aside from hashish, other hemp-based intoxicants find their way into the

mushaʿirah setting. In addition to spirits, early Urdu poet Zuhur al-Din Hatim was a

regular *bhāng* user in youth during his soldiering days before renouncing both narcotics

later in life though it seems he kept smoking tobacco and drinking coffee with great

relish (Khub Chand Zaka 2011: 152). *Bhāng* is an intoxicant made with hemp leaves and

stems with very little tetrahydrocannabinol and is usually associated with Hindu

religious festivities and celebrations. Bindraban Das Khushgu records an extended

example about bhang among Gulshan's coterie of students which probably took place

on the banks of a tributary near the Yamuna River:

111

The one who gave opium to Pinaki,
left a tress of Layla in the hand of Majnun.

He is a drunkard, a libertine, a shameless man;
He's not even Pinki, he's opium (*taryāk*), nothing else.
(trans Pellò 2009: 7)

پنکی را کسی که افیون داد
زلف لیلیٰ بدست مجنون داد

لاوبالی و مست بیباک است
پنکی نیست محض تریاک است

278

One day he was sitting on the banks of a stream, in the shrine of a darvish, with two or three friends. With a cup full of bhang in his hand, he was talking about it: "Some friends describe bhang with the word *rain*, and Indians call the night "*rain.*" Is it because the color of bhang resembles that of the night, or is *rain* used to allude to earth, since whoever takes bhang is brought down to the earth?" I arrived during this conversation and listened to it. He saw me, and after the greetings I said: "O master, the word *rain* is a term used by Indian dyers and indicates the vats where they keep colors, especially the color red, and in which they immerse clothes to dye them. This is the clear similitude between *rain* and bhang: if you immerse yourself in it, it makes you colorful!" [The poet] Tahsin offered the cup to me and said: "Since you are a Hindu, this is your job!" (Trans. Ibid.)

The Yamuna River had all kinds of relaxing places to sit and enjoy the water and light—

we will meet this band of poets in the last chapter when Tahsin, Jaʿfar Jurʾat, ʿAndalib,

and Khushgu will go at the Zinat al-Nisa mosque with Gulshan for poetry gatherings.

Tahsin greets his friend here and casts Khushgu in the role of the Beloved as a clothes

dyer (*rangrez*), a particularly Hindu profession at that. Khushgu slightly flirted with him

to begin with, giving him entreating clues through their discussion of the word Hindi

word *rain.*

Tobacco

Tobacco, on the other hand, was first a curiosity among the nobility, but it

quickly became a cheap and accessible drug in both Safavid and Mughal realms where it

was also eventually cultivated (Gokhale 1974; Floor 2002; James Grehan 2006; Mills and

Barton 2007; Romaniello 2007; Withington 2011). Fittingly, its consumption was

partenered with modes of literary sociability as seen in anecdotes about it use and

poems complimenting the habit, though sometimes in a backhanded tone (Sayyid ʿAli

Al-i Dawud 1997). The naked Sufi mystic, Muhammad Saʾid Sarmad (1590-1661), a

Jewish merchant who converted to Islam and came to India during the reign of Shah

Jahan, gestures towards the prevalence of tobacco smoking:[112]

<div dir="rtl">

تنباکو چیست آفت برگ امید
گلخن به از آن گلو که این دود کشید
از تنباکو نفع توان داشت گمان
از دود اگر خانه توان کرد سفید

</div>

What is tobacco, [but] the pestilence of the leaf of hope.
A chimney is better than the throat that draws its smoke.
We could guess at tobacco's benefit,
If we could whitewash our homes with [its] smoke.

Danishmand Khan, a courtier in the Hyderabad court of Nizm al-Mulk Asif Jah I who

wrote under the pen name ʿAqil, on the other hand records a quatrain praising the

sociability of tobacco:

<div dir="rtl">

ای خوشا عشوه‌های تنباکو
عالمی مبتلا ی تنباکو
زلف لیلی و طره حور است

</div>

---

[112] In Matthee's chapter on tobacco use in Safavid Iran, he attributes this verse to Tahir Nasrabadi.

دود راحت فزای تنباکو

Bravo for tobacco's deceptions!
A world in the entanglement of tobacco—
It's the tresses of Laila and the tricks of heaven's virgins.
Oh the soothing smoke of tobacco!

Shah Gulshan told Bindraban Das Khushgu that the Safavid poet Zulali Khansari (d.

1615) did not learn the trade of rhetoric (*kasab-i sukhan*) under anyone, as being

apprenticed to a master was customary for students of literature during this time.

Instead he picked up poetic composition in the presence of master poets while

changing out the hookahs in the mushaʿirahs of the poet ʿAbd Allah Hatifi

(1454-1520).[113] While Zulali was thought to have had a very long life and perhaps could

have been part of Hatifi's gatherings, tobacco had not been introduced to Iran until the

early 1600s (see Matthee). Even the Iranian origins of the hookah or *qalyān* have been

called into question given that one of the earliest references to smoking tobacco in a

pipe was from a physician who left for India during the reign of Akbar. Based on this

and his etymological arguments of the various words in Arabic and Persian for water

pipe, Rudi Matthee puts its origins in India (Matthee 2005: 126). While the idea of a

young Zulali learning poetry while changing out water pipes in mushaʿirahs is

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[113] Sher Khan Lodi incorrectly assigned Zulali to the tutelage of Jalal al-Din Asir who died much later in 1649 (Khushgu 2010: 272; Lodi 1998: 62).

intriguing, Shah Gulshan was casting this historical tidbit according to the terms of his

present in 18th-century Delhi where tobacco was regularly smoked at musha'irahs.

Shah Hatim wrote two *masnawī*s on coffee and another long poem on tobacco

and the water pipe. In his Urdu composition on coffee he ends praising the perfect

pairing of coffee and tobacco:

<div dir="rtl">

جہاں میں زندگی حاتم دو دم ہے
ادھر قہوہ ادھر حقہ کا دم ہے

</div>

> As long life is but two breaths in this world, Oh Hatim
> First I'll take is a sip of coffee and then a puff of the water pipe
> (Zuhur al-Din Hatim 2010: 210).

Hatim's love for smoking knew no bounds in his engaging *masnawī* on describing

tobacco and the hookah, where he clearly shows smoking's lyrical nature in that it

brings the opposing elements of water, air, and fire together in the waterpipe. As we

will see in his description of coffee below, he also notes the leveling aspect of tobacco's

sociability between kings and commoners. He ends the poem making a play on words

with the concept of *ham-dam* or friend, the person who shares breath with you.

<div dir="rtl">

تمام عالم میں حاتم ڈھونڈھ آیا
پر ایسا دوسرا ہمدم نہ پایا

</div>

> I've gone searching the world over, Oh Hatim,
> But never have I found another companion that I can share my breath with.
> (Ibid.: 215)

282

Given its prevalence, even Jaʿfar Zatalli (d. 1713) wrote a verse set on tobacco noting its

sociability in a backhanded way:

<div dir="rtl">

طرفه شغلی است شغل تنباکو
که ازین شغل غم فرو گردد
همدم است این به وقت تنهایی
طبع بادی ازو نکو گردد

</div>

          Smoking tobacco is a novel pastime;
          Smoking happens to dispel worry and sorrow.
          It's with your every breath when alone;
          It also happens to make farting seem elegant.
          (Jaʿfar Zatalli 2003: 256)

Zatalli had a truly novel ability to draw parallels between bodily functions and social

habits. One of Zatalli's stylistic predecessors, a poet named Mulla Shaida who had some

notoriety in Jahangir and Shahjahan's courts, would spend much of his time hanging

out in the tobacco sellers' shops (Muhammad Sadiq Kashmiri Hamdani 1990). In regards

to a young Zulali learning verses while changing hookah pipes, it would seem plausible

that at gatherings servants would walk away with verses on their minds. However, I

found not mentioned of hookah servers learning verse.

Coffee

      On the other hand, the young men who served coffee to poets were famous

objects of desire in Isfahan during the 1600s. The Arab Coffeehouse was noted for its

boys with long hair where poets gather and even the king would show up (Babayan

2002). A particular coffee server named Quraqash inspired the Kashani poet Qazi Asad

to write a verse for him when he fell in love with Quraqash at the coffee house.

بر دوش گرفتم علم رسوایی
در بر کردم علامت شیدایی
آواره شدم ز شیخی و ملایی
قربان شو مت دگر چه می فرمایی

I take the flag of disgrace on my shoulders;
I wear the mark of madness on my chest;
I wandered from my duties as a preacher;
I have sacrificed myself for you. Would you
request anything else?

Some of these servers did write verse and it appears the Isfahani barristas had

developed their own circles of influence. A former clothes dyer named Muhammad

Salih also fell in love with Quraqash and became his disciple (Tahir 2000: 605-6).

Another poet named Rashid Zargir who eventually left for India got into some kind of

disagreement with Quraqash over another attractive coffee server named Typhoon

(*tūfān*) (ibib.). A merchant named Muhammad Qasim from Lahijan, who wrote under the

pen name Sabir, lost his wares when his boat capsized, and though he survived, he had

to become a barista out of necessity. Nasrabadi quotes a poem by him where he mourns

his loss in status:

284

<div dir="rtl">

کسی که آتش غلیان طلب کند گویم
چنان بچشم که بیرون جهد ز دیده شرار

</div>

Someone asked for some fire for his kettle, I say,
"Absolutely, outside of this toil, there are sparks to be seen."

Coffee was still primarily grown in Yemen and other parts of the Middle East and had to be imported into Iranian lands along overland routes; in India it was brought in through sea trade along the western coast where it eventually took hold as a cultivated crop in the south.[114] Beginning in Ottoman Turkey in the early 1500s, coffee became so popular that it created a change in the public culture of the time by creating a yet another social category (Rudi Matthee 1994, 1996; Çaksu 2007; Mikhail 2007; Sajdi 2007; Hakala 2011). Turkey's experiences with coffee goes back to the Ottoman conquest of the Hijaz and Mecca and Medina where coffee had been drunk for some time being brought over from Ethiopia by the various Sufi orders who used it there. The year 1515 marks the first documented coffeehouse in Istanbul opened by purveyors from Damascus. Outside of the mosque and the Sufi hermitage, away from the bureaucratic apparatuses of the state, and no longer in the privacy of the home, the coffee house

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[114] We have to note, that tea was not the beverage of choice in among 18th-century literary communities. Tea would come later and eventually display Delhi's coffee drinking culture.

created a fourth social space for Ottoman urbanites as consumers. The spread of coffee

in the three gunpowder empires had large social implications for their respective

public cultures. After the Ottoman Empire, the Safavids started imbibing coffee in the

late 1500s during the reign of Shah Abbas I (McChensey 1996:244; Matthee 1993:22)

where it spread quite rapidly to many cities across the Iranian plateau. The literature

about the Iranian context in the 18th century is quite extensive and covered in sources

like European travelogues and contemporary compendiums. It is also alluded to in

verses. In Isfahan, as we have already seen, Tahir Nasrabadi's tazkirah completed

around 1680 is famous for chronicling the anecdotes and recitations associated with

impromptu coffeehouse musha'irahs. Strangely, the coffeehouse culture of the Iranians

and Ottomans did not reach beyond the Oxus river. Robert McChensey points out in his

discussion of Muhammad Badi' Malih's trip across Iran from 1679-1682, the Turani poet

and writer did not make any mention of coffeehouses or coffee in his description of

poets in Bukhara, Balkh or Samarqand, but his travels in Safavid lands south of the Oxus

hold no shortage of anecdotes and descriptions of coffeehouses and the poets that

frequented them (McChesney 1996). Significantly, Malih ran into Tahir Nasrabadi in

Isfahan where he spent time with the chronicler and poet in the mosque and

coffeehouse near the Safavid *Masjid-i Lanbān*, attending mushaʿirahs and carousing the dozen or so coffeehouses spread over Isfahan's urban center.

India's experience with coffee seems to parallel the introduction of tobacco. Yet unlike tobacco, coffee did not become widely popular outside of Mughal India's elite urban circles. India was in the path of the same ocean trade routes used by Europeans for Safavid Iran, so Dutch traders would import beans to the Konkan coast from Mokhah in Yemen in addition to the large port city of Surat. In the 17th century Delhi got its beans from Arab and Dutch traders through the port city of Surat or they were brought in by overland Arab traders coming in from the north and west. Judging by anecdotes in Persian and Indian tazkirahs by the late 17th century, coffee seems to have taken hold among Delhi's literary crowd as poets moved between Safavid and Mughal cities.

Tazkirah writers were quick to point out the sociability of coffee and verse. Turani poet Muhammad Badiʿ Malih was returning to his home in Samarqand from his trip through Safavid Iran, when he passed back via Mashhad, stopping at a coffeehouse near the the Imam Riza shrine he had visited on his outbound trip. There he met a poet named Qasim Divanah Mashhadi (d. before 1680). Divanah recited some poems from his

diary in their impromptu coffeehouse gathering that were well received by the others

there:

<div dir="rtl">

به قامت تو نه شمع و نه سرو می ماند
ز مطلعی است که یک مصرعش فراموش است

</div>

    With a figure like yours neither a flame nor a cyprus would compare;
    It's for the sake of a *matlaʿ* that one of its lines is forgotten.[115]
    (Muhammad Badiʿ Maliha 2011: 312)

Qasim also claimed to have been in a Qizilibash unit sent by Shah Abbas I (r. 1587-1629)

to help the leader of the Bukhara Khanate, Wali Muhammad Khan (d.1611), in his

ultimately futile struggle to retain leadership. The East India Company official and

traveller George Forster noted in his travelogue that in coffeehouses "the favorite topic

is war: there you may hear of exploits performed by a single arm, at the recital of

which, even Scundar [sic] would have grown pale, and Rustum [sic] himself

trembled" (Forster 1808:279). Perhaps Qasim was just a good storyteller, as McChensey

suggests, for had he been involved in the Bukhara campaign this would have put him at

over 80 years of age and he had not come close to finishing his travels. Apparently

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[115]

<div dir="rtl">

به بستری که مرا آشنا بر و دوش است
ز مخملی است که خوابش به چشم خرگوش است

</div>

In being bedridden, only my hands and arms are friendly with me
It's because of the velvet that he absolutely dreams of a rabbit.

Qasim had previously been in Isfahan where Nasrabadi had also known him. Tahir

Nasrabadi, who was quite a gossip on account his own connections to coffeehouses,

informs us that in Qasim's youth he and some of his friends, due to the necessity of love

and companionship (*bah maqtazā-yi hawā wa musāhibat*), were turned toward some

indecent behavior (*mutawajjah-i harkathāy-i nā munāsib*) (Nasrabadi 2000: 473). Malih

notes in his tazkirah that upon returning to Samarqand he got word that Qasim

Divanah's poetry was becoming popular in India, and when he saw the poet's works this

seemed to confirm that Qasim Divanah had indeed gone to far-off Delhi where he

ended up passing away some time before 1680 according to Nasrabadi.

Writing in the late 17th and early 18th century, one of Nasrabadi and Badiʿ's

Indian contemporaries was the poet and chronicler Muhammad Afzal Sarkhush

(1640-1715). Sarkhush was mentioned earlier as a member of Bedil's literary circles who

hosted his own coterie of poets and no-accounts. Sarkhush seems to confirm that

Divanah made it to India and was holding court in Chandni Chowk's few coffee houses

as well. Sarkhush ran into a Qasim Khan Divanah a few times, and found him to be an

arrogant poet who was careless with others' verse. However, he praised one of Qasim's

compositions that "his ear imbibed" (*bah gosh khordah*) while they were sitting in a

coffeehouse:

<div dir="rtl">

نگاهم را به دام افتاده عکس شعله پردازی
خموش ای هم‌نفس یک دم که در صید پریزادم

</div>

> The reflection of the lamp's wick threw a net over my eyes.
> Simmer down, my friend, for I am already in the trap of that fairy-born one.
> (Sarkhush 2010: 85)

"Go on being careless!" Sarkhush shouted when he praised Qasim Divanah. A

generation later, Hazin's friend and former traveling companion, Walih Daghistani

(1712-1756), would write "Mulla" Qasim Mashhadi earned the pen name "Divanah,"

meaning maddened by love, because he left Isfahan with its host of coffeehouses and

poets for India where he found a similarly intentioned group of poets (Walih 2005:1812).

Though the coffeehouses of Delhi were popular and hosted lively discussions

and impromptu poetry recitations, their numbers were fewer than Isfahan's. Aside from

Farhat Hasan's informative discussion of pre-colonial India's heterogenous publics,

there has not been a detailed study of coffeehouse culture in India's early modern era

unlike the many examinations that have illuminated quite a bit of Ottoman and Safavid

coffee-drinking publics (Rudi Matthee 1994; Hasan 2005: 204). Nonetheless, as

Sarkhush's interaction with Qasim Divanah attests, Chandni Chowk's few coffeehouses were significant hangouts for poets and their hangers-on.

Another time, Sarkhush was sitting in a coffeehouse when the poet Muʿnim Hakkak Shirazi (died mid-17th century) dropped by with a fresh poem that he had composed. Hakkak was famous for composing a *masnawī* in praise of Akbarabad (Agra) and had tutored Sarkhush in his youth (210: 179). In the coffeehouse, Hakkak recites:

$$قیامت است گلستان به غیر یار مرا$$
$$صدای صور بُود نالۀ هزار مرا$$

The garden without the friend is an apocalypse to me.
The nightingale's song shall be the call of Gabriel's horn for me.

In Sarkhush's two anecdotes there are a number of significant details to examine. One, the coffeehouse is plainly a place for off-the-cuff recitation of verse or to showcase a new theme, concept, or meaning that a poet had been crafting in gatherings or in private. Both Qasim Divanah and Hakkak used the setting to stage some of their new compositions.

The Kaysth secretary and poet associated with Arzu and Bedil, Anand Ram Mukhlis (1699-1750), used to frequent Chandni Chowk's coffeehouses in his youth and paints a clear picture of it as an institution for the city's literary groups. "Gatherings of

men with innate rhetorical flourish and cultured people with words sweeter than a garden nightingale are assembled twice a day" (Mukhlis 2013: 571). Sarkhush's student Bindraban Das Khushgu would frequent the Chandni Chowk's coffeehouses as well. Once he encountered the poet Shah Yaqin Yaqin who he memorializes as being a good poetry reciter who spends his time with his friends relaxing in one of Chandni Chowk's coffeehouses (this is not the Urdu poet Yaqin mentioned above). He records this poem that he must have heard at an impromptu coffeehouse gathering:

مارا نبود طاقت بر خاستن از جا
چون داغ به هر جا که نشستیم نشستیم

I don't have the strength to leave this place,
Since wherever I sit there are scars.

In many ways, these few improvised notations of verse and momentary gatherings confirms to the popular and scholarly view of coffeehouses in Isfahan or Istanbul, places that in some estimations set the stage for a public sphere to emerge or at the very least became performative spaces for poetry recitation, its perception, and circulation.

In India, however, coffeehouses and coffee drinking were perhaps associated with "foreign culture," an expensive pastime, that was probably largely confined to

Delhi which had a significant influx of Iranian and Turk immigrants. Rudi Matthee writes that coffee drinking was largely an urban phenomenon in Iran and the presence of coffeehouses outside of urban centers is difficult to surmise. Mukhlis' statements on the subject seem to agree with this view, noting that coffee plants are found in the valley of Arabia and Abyssinia (2013: 570) and that stylish coffeehouses can be found in great numbers in Muslim lands outside of India, like Iran and Turkey (*vilāyat*). The only coffee bush in Delhi was in the emperor's garden which Mukhlis had never seen in person, but someone had shown him a handful of its green, unripened beans.

Dargah Quli Khan brings up a verse on coffee in the context of visiting the *Sarā'ī-yi ʿUrāb* or the Arab's Caravansary where the Arab traders and immigrants would gather to celebrate the prophet's birthday in the area's local mosque. The Arabs would serve their overly sweetened brew in "the large cups of a coffee-glutton" (*piyālah-yi kalān-i qahwah-khwor*), and incessantly trouble their guests who would get annoyed at that fact that the Arabs' coffee made them nauseous (Quli Khan 1993: 75). Dargah Quli Khan went there with Syed Hashmat Khan, a friend from Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah's court, who had to say this verse about the Arab preference for coffee:

روزی بخانهٔ عربی میهمان شدم
چندان خورند قهوه که من قهوه‌دان شدم

The day I was a guest at an Arab's house
They drank so much coffee I became a coffeepot. (Ibid.)

Also, both Hakkak and Qasim Divanah were from Iran where coffeehouse culture had made strong roots. These two Iranian poets away from home and with some social standing may have turned to the coffeehouse to connect to a cultural space and a form of companionship more familiar to them. Similarly, the coffeehouses may have been explicitly catering to Delhi's foreign consumers: the coffee-drinking poets, secretaries, and academics of the Persian bureaucratic economy who had emigrated from Iran or other lands into Delhi were more familiar with coffee-drinking and probably formed a notable aspect of coffeehouse clientele. Gesturing toward economic patterns associated with the coffeehouse, Mukhlis notes there are a few establishments in Chandni Chowk where "in recent days the respected ones from the men of good disposition would drop in to let some poetry recitation and entertaining conversation role off their tongues, and drink a few pricey cups from the barista" (Anand Ram Mukhlis 2013: 571). The cost of coffee from a coffeehouse was significantly expensive enough for Mukhlis to note—as opposed to tobacco which gets no detailed treatment in tazkirahs. There was also

"bazaar coffee" (*qahwah-yi bāzār*) that his friends would have sipped while they strolled through the *chowk* or town square, taking in the sights and talking with each other (ibid.). Mukhlis would abstain from the street coffee and have his servants boil him some and carry it along for him instead of having to purchase the perhaps questionable street brew. If the Arabs' coffee at the *maulad* gives us any clue, it was perhaps understandable why Mukhlis avoided the bazaar coffee.

In spite good coffee's price as a foreign commodity, poets still reveled in the companionship that was engendered by drinking coffee together. There is a parallel in Delhi's Chandini Chowk with the coffeehouse scenes in Istanbul and Isfahan: they all are extra-state discursive spaces or precursor literary spheres that pre-dated their British incarnation by a century or so and allowed for communication, enjoyment, and entertainment around a consumer product. The companionship, conversation, and poetry recitation were semi-public aspects of a space enjoyed by upper class and perhaps middle class men who made a daily habit of holding court to glance at the attractive coffee servers, gossip, recite verse, and listen to orators. That "*bāzārī qahwah*" was available to people of less means might hint at middle and lower class coffee

drinker also taking part in this conversational setting. Mukhlis presents a ghazal by Mir

Saʿid that illustrates this idea of gathering outside the confines of the court (ibid.: 571):

مرا در قهوه بودن بهر از بزم سهان باشد
که اینجا میهمان را منتی بر میزبان باشد

> For me being in a coffeehouse would be better than kings' banquets.
> For here there would be some obligation on the host toward his guest.

Plainly, the verse illustrates the a less formal aspect of literary sociability the

coffeehouse had the possibility of holding. Zuhur al-Din Hatim (1699-1781/93), whom

we remember form the previous chapter holding a mushaʿirah beside the Yamuna river

in a Sufi hermitage, wrote a long poem praising the effects of coffee in which he also

notes the informal aspect of literary sociability that drinking coffee with companions

engendered. Explicitly, he frames the warmth of coffee with the warmth of

companionship or "hanging out" with friends and having lively conversation (*garmī-yi*

sohbat). He lists his patron's name at the end and presents an intertextual verse about

Muhsin al-Mulk's gathering. I'm inclined to think the *masnawī* was read aloud in some

context or other on account of the last lines where Hatim reference's his patron's

gathering or *bazm.* In this regard, the main thrust of Hatim's composition aims too

bring the sociability of the coffeehouse into the court, to encourage all members of the

296

gathering to soak up the relaxed form of sociability coffee creates among its drinkers when they sit tother (see Appendix L).

Hatim, Mukhlis, and Saʾid's verses make plain how important coffee drinking became for the mushaʿirah setting. In Hatim's *masnawī* and the ghazals by Saʿid and Hashmat, the social necessity of coffee allows for the the smells and sensations of the Persian lyrical tradition to seep into the mushaʿirah setting. It seems the Indian writers were more intent on comparing the effects of alcohol with coffee, given their familiarity with it in the mushaʿirah setting. Mukhlis composed this *rubāʿī*:

<div dir="rtl">

هر چند شراب انبساط افزاید
لیکن اقسام فتنه زان می زاید
میلم با قهوه زین جهت هست کز او
بوی جگر برشته‌ای می آید

</div>

However giddy alcohol makes you feel,
It will bring about all kinds of wickedness.
For this reason, I am pleased with coffee for from it
Comes the sent of a roasted liver.

Like Hatim's coffee bean, Mukhlis makes coffee a referent for the ghazal's Lover, separated from the Beloved (the coffee bush?) and tortured by the barista. Explicitly, the smell of the Lover's burning liver or heart is the same scent that comes up from a fresh cup of coffee being passed around a gathering. Verse about coffee brings a scent and taste into the mushaʿirah whereby the coffee bean becomes competition for the

297

Lover since it is roasted and crushed—actions usually associated with the Lover's body. Additionally, Hatim uses the coffee bean to reference the Beloved's black mole; coffee-drinking poets would have a connection to the idealized Beloved through not only their verse but the coffee they drink. What all three poets show us is how a consumable stimulant facilitated literary sociability and promoted an informal mode of literary sociability within the salon setting. Mir Saʿid forsakes the king's halls for the coffeehouse because there he doesn't find the hierarchy between guest and host. Hatim makes it clear that coffee drinkers don't need to be worried about protocol and formality when he asks, "What sort of formality would there be for the coffee drinker?" Perhaps the reason for this relaxed sociability is from the way consumable products in the mushaʿirah space reference the literary world. The roasted bean or the scent of coffee invokes the Lover's enthusiasm in the poets. To make the scent of coffee recognizable it has to invoke the scent and tastes of the Lover's sorrows and tortures.

Alcohol

It's no coincidence that Mukhlis and Hatim would compare coffee with alcohol, an alchemical substance more familiar to poets in 18th-century India. Dargah Quli Khan quotes a verse often recited by the salon impresario Latif Khan who hosted singers,

dancing girls, poets, and other performers in his residence both before and after Nadir

Shah's attack in 1739:

<div dir="rtl">

در حریم بزم مستان دور صبح و شام نیست

گردش جام است این جا گردش ایام نیست

</div>

> In the harem of the drunkards' parties there is no cycle of day and night;
> It's the glass that circulates here, it's not the vicissitudes of the days.

Latif Khan is expressing the timelessness of the salon in the context of poetry recitation

and other festivities he would host. There are many tazkirah references for gatherings

where poets and listeners were getting drunk. Khushgu, who kept a well-attended

gathering during the 1730s and 1740s called upon his friend Muhammad Sadiq Ilqa to

invite him to the event. Ilqa said, "You're wasting your gold. Instead spend it on me in

booze and women" (Khushgu 1959: 278).

Sarkhush, whose name means "drunk," seems to be one polestar in this milieu

along with Bedil (Pellò 2014b). Sarkhush regularly went around to Delhi's gatherings

and writes about a distinct memory from his youth. The poet Mulla Bekhud Namdar

Khan (d. 1670/71) was a guest at at the home of a Mughal paymaster named Luhrasp

Beg "reciting poetry and drunk as a boiled owl, with a bottle of wine at his side and a

cup in his hand" (Sarkhush 2010: 47). As his mushaʿirah companions rose to for prayer

299

time, Bekhud also got up and went to join them. A young Sarkhush, piped up, "Master

Sahib, what kind of *namāz* is this?" Bekhud responded, "Are not all prayers of the same

quality?" (*hamānā namāz bakaifiyat hamīn ast*). One of the main reasons to abstain from

alcohol according to Islamic doctrine is that inebriation could interfere with prayer.

Bekhud is making a typical joke one hears in South Asia where someone actually gives a

better *namāz* when drunk. Since the word *kaifiyat* also refers to the quality of being

drunk, Bekhud was unambiguously admitting that he was praying drunk during a

mushaʿirah.

One of Sarkhush's associates was a poet named Muhammad Beg Haqiqi (c.

1680s).[116] When all his friends were getting together for a *majlis* at Haqiqi's home,

Sarkhush playfully writes that there must have been some fairies coming through.

Haqiqi's gaze fell on a green bottle full of red wine and he said, "What color is this, what

---

[116] Haqiqi wrote a line that everyone liked, but no one could compose a rejoinder to it:

<div dir="rtl">

در حقیقت دگری نیست خداییم همه

لیک از گردش یک نقطه جداییم همه

</div>

    In reality there is no Other, to us God is one/we are all God

    But in this gyre, we are all the same disparate specks

Only their friend Muhammad Faruq could come up with something close:

<div dir="rtl">

قطره بگریست که از بحر جداییم همه

بحر بر قطره بخندید که ماییم همه

</div>

    The droplet shall weep, "I am totally separate from the ocean."

    The ocean shall laugh at the droplet, "But I am everything."

color is this, what color is this?" It seems he recited what Anand Ram Mukhlis called a

"*parī khwān*" or a fairy call, by stating his question three times in the room where he

and his friends were drinking (Mukhlis 2013: 173). Then from a corner of the house

"where there was no one" a voice came that Haqiqi's guests must have heard: "it's an

emerald-like bottle and ruby wine" (*bah mīnā-yi zumurrudagūn mei-yi laʿl*).

Another time back in Delhi, the poet Mir Tafil Muhammad (d. 1738), a friend of

Ghulam ʿAli Azad's also from the qasbah town of Bilgram to the east of Delhi (Bilgrami

2012: 251-2), happened to run Sarkhush's hero and good friend the *tāzah-goʾī* poet Nasir

ʿAli[117] on his way to Begum Bagh in Delhi's Chandani Chowk. Tafil was also heading that

way so they took a carriage together. In a little while after they reached the garden he

noticed Nasir ʿAli and his friends winking at each other (*bah aima-yi chashm guftagū mī*

---

[117] Sarkhush thought Nasir ʿAli was an admirable person and wrote a verse about him that Azad Bilgrami (1704-1785) heard at a mushaʿirah (Bilgrami 1913: 144):

In the nation of speech, ʿAli is world conquering	در ملک سخن بود جهانگیر علی
He is a saint when it comes to the disposition of the heart, Oh ʿAli, *pīr* ʿAli.	در مشرب دل ولی علی پیر علی
No one's verse would match the verse of ʿAli	با شعر علی نمی رسد شعر کسی
With that dignity when someone's letter is marked by Mir ʿAli	زان شان که خط کس بخط میر علی

Someone at the event didn't think the verb rasidan could be conjugated as *mī rasad* as Sarkhush had done in his verse about Nasir ʿAli. Azad Bilgrami witnessed him recite a verse by poet Salim Tahrani to prove the usage was correct and to silence his critic:

In kindness, the white hand of Moses would not appear on your forearm;	با لطف ساعدت ید بیضا نمی رسد
Just as no Christ-like words would come before your lip.	پیش لبت سخن به مسیحا نمی رسد

kunand). He thought, "What do they want?" So he uttered this saying aloud and went

and sat down next them, "My wine cellar is farther down the road than my friend's."

Sure enough, they brought out a bottle and a glass. Tafil notes, "As soon as the wine

server began pouring and the froth began to come up from the gurgling wine, it was

clear:" Nasir ʿAli and his friends were drinking on the sly and having an impromptu

poetry gathering. Nasir ʿAli, already drunk, recited this poem that Tafil quickly

recorded down in his *bayāz*:

<div dir="rtl">

کدامین مست را امشب سر جنگ است با زاهد
که مینا هم ز خوش می زره زیر قبا دارد

</div>

> Tonight, for which drunkard is there war with the teetotaler?
> For underneath my tunic the goblet poured me chain mail made of wine.

"An impromptu verse by an intoxicated Nasir ʿAli" (*badīhah-yi nāsir ʿalī-yi mastānah*),

Tafil wrote in his diary next to the ghazal; he later showed it to Azad Bilgrami (Ghulam

ʿAli Azad Bilgrami 2012). If we remember from the last chapter, Azad Bilgrami's friend

Jaʿfar Ruh Ranbirpuri later visited Nasir ʿAli's grave in the shrine of Nizam al-Din Auliya

where their playful recitations alluded to Nasir ʿAli's famous wine drinking. "What

came of the saying of yours, anyhow?" Ruhi's friend asked and recited the lines:

<div dir="rtl">

خاک گردیدیم و می رقصه هنوز افغان ما

</div>

302

<div dir="rtl">

خم شکست اما نمی ریزد می جوشان ما
</div>

> 'I turned to dust and yet my lament dances on;
> The bottle broke but my frothing wine isn't spilling?' "

Ruhi said, "That lament of Nasir's is the one dancing on your tongue," perhaps also calling his Nasir ʿAli-reciting friend a drunkard like the poet (Ghulam ʿAli Azad Bilgrami 1913).

Conclusion

The chapter first examined the way poets and tazkirah writers relished social transgression in the mushaʿirah setting by examining specific instances where decorum was violated. In the previous chapters we've witnessed many instances of this already and Hazin's conduct in a mushaʿirah should be memorable for the battles it started. Yet, it was these very conflicts that prompted many tazkirah writers to actually go and visit Hazin to see if the rumors of his "inappropriateness" were true. In the second section I examined this particular tazkirah trope. In the final and third section, I examined chemical forms of sociability among inebriated poets. The introduction of tobacco and

coffee quickly added their sensations to the world of the ghazal as their consumption

and circulation indexed qualities associated the Lover of Persophone literature.

These violations in decorum serve the ghazal universe which lyric poetry depicts.

In breaking mushaʿirah norms, the poets enact a small world of lyrical realization as

their actions, words, and values conform to a literary epistemology that references

itself. By concentrating on these ambiguous modes of decorum, it is hoped that a more

playful and poetic version of the Persophone cosmopolis will arise where literature

takes on a more material incarnation.

Chapter 4
Gulshan's Embrace: Music and the Voice in the Mushaʿirah

<div dir="rtl">

مطرب دل نے مرے تار نفس سے غالب

ساز پر رشتہ بئے نغمۂ بیدل باندھا

</div>

The musician which is the heart, with my breath's wire, oh Ghalib,
Strung the guitar in pursuit of Bedil's song.[118]

    This chapter examines early modern forms of aurality as they structure the

mushaʿirah's particular form of literary sociability through music and eroticism

according to Islamic understandings of excess and literary ambiguity. In 1700s India,

the voice was an associative aspect of the self to be used in myriad interactions between

patrons, poets, and listeners on the streets, in the court, among friends at home, and

wherever there might be an occasion to sing or recite verse. The voice takes on a

renewed social importance during the 1700s, a time in which devotional music and

listening was being debated in the religious sphere; the imperial court was patronizing

a new form of singing; and the Persian language literati were in the midst of arguing

about vernacular and literary style. From the point of view of the literary gathering,

this chapter engages these issues to understand how the period's Islamicate symbology

---

[118] Khushgu actually provides an example of Bedil's song in his *Safinah*. See Appendix M.

pertaining to music and the voice had implications for meaning in poetic language as well.

The 18th century was an engaging and complex time for early modern Indian society on the cusp of colonial domination. The Mughal imperium had lost vast amounts of revenue to internal military action against refractory kingdoms and it was unable to adequately hold its centralized governing authority since it had ceded power to the many land grant holders managing its agriculture-based economy. The Safavid empire in the Iranian plateau had been culturally and economically wedded to Mughal lands for a century and a half by this point, but it had come to an end in 1736 at the hands of the overlord Nadir Shah. In 1739 the warlord came to India and sacked Delhi, Mughal India's heart. Due to the region's reshuffling political framework, fragmented power structures, and the fact that nascent colonial powers had taken a permanent foothold on India's coasts, many historians have marked the 18th century as an Indic dark age, blotting out much of the era's rich social history (Umar 1993, 1998; Alavi 2002; Chandra 2002; Marshall 2003). Period writings on literary sociability tell a different story.

In spite of the Mughal imperium disintegrating, the central court and regional

lordships maintained their networks of religious, literary, musical, and craft-based

patronage. *Dhrupad,* the elite's favored singing approach, had fallen out of favor for a

style sung by popular devotional singers. The Sufi brotherhoods and sects were in the

middle of a debate on the nature of being and some groups regularly used music and

verse as a public and popular means to circulate religious ideas (Ziad 2007, 2008, 2010).

Not surprisingly, these issues were taken up by the literati of the time who were in the

midst of their own skirmish on the nature of meaning, theme, and poetic imitation.

Until the early 19th century, India was the center of the Persian-speaking world;

Persian was not wedded to a single geography or nationalist ideology when it would

"return" to Iranian soil in the 19th century (Tavakoli-Targhi 2001a).[119] Yet, during the

early 1600s, members of the Persian literary sphere began critiquing the "fresh-

speaking" or *tāzah-goʾī* approach to literature cultivated from Samarqand to Calcutta,

questioning who could set the terms of literary style. This was a "modernist" aesthetic

where poets and critics were experimenting with how far meaning and theme could be

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[119] Part of the aim of this dissertation is to write a more nuanced history of Persian literature in India as many of these 19th-century views are projected backwards on to epochs were nationalist identity, even proto-nationalist identity simply did not exist.

developed within Persophone lyrical convention and still uphold the aesthetic values instilled by writing from the age of Hafiz and Rumi. The debate on "fresh-speaking" poetry would inform vernacular writers' approach as Urdu became a vernacular that would serve as the literary lingua franca at the end of the 1700s. It's within this complex social setting that we seek to understand the role of publicly sung literature in structuring early modern modes of belonging

In this chapter, I take a broad approach to the role of the voice in not only the musha'irah of the 1700s but in late Mughal India's public sphere as a whole, a realm in which musical and poetic epistemologies overlapped. Mughal-era elite entertainment was largely conducted in gatherings or *majālis* (s. *majlis*), a social institution somewhat parallel to the soiree or salon culture of France's 18th century. The *majlis* (*mahfil* or *bazm* as it was also called) was not just for literature or poetry recitation; some gatherings were staffed by dancers and singers as well, and often a totality of visual, aural, and sensual practices culminated in Mughal gatherings. Alcohol or coffee, hookahs were smoked, and perfumes were passed around. Interestingly, the *majlis* itself is a trope

within the *ghazal* or lyric poem where the Lover (the poem's tortured speaker)[120] sees

the Beloved (the beguiling but cruel object of desire) only to be ignored or cast out,

concepts illustrated by Asad Allah Khan Ghalib (d. 1869):

<div dir="rtl">

بوئے گل نالۂ دل دود چراغ محفل
جو تری بزم سے نکلا سو پریشاں نکلا

</div>

> The scent of the rose, the lament of the heart, and the smoke of the gathering's lamp—
> Whomever departs from your gathering leaves disheveled/disarranged.

In this vein, contemporary scholarship is beginning to better understand the socio-

aesthetic function of the Mughal *majlis* as a semi-institutional space that celebrates the

"poignancy of transience" (Schofield personal communication).[121] As described by

Schofield, this is a space where all aesthetic resources are brought to capitalize on

pleasures that fade like music, song, dance, perfumes, intoxicants, and beautiful bodies

(see also Brown 2006). In an age with no mechanical reproduction, where good writing

---

[120] When analyzing poetry I capitalize the words "Lover" (ʿāshiq) and "Beloved" (maʿshūq) to illustrate the paradigmatic quality these characters host in signifying alterity for Arabic, Persian, Urdu and many other Islamicate literatures. Additionally, this relationship is usually imagined as between an older man as the Lover (the active if unsuccessful "self") and a pubescent boy as the Beloved (the passive but unattainable "other"). This relationship is not completely erotic either. The Beloved can be interpreted as woman or even God himself or an actual tyrant. In the contemporary era with the Muslim anxiety about the US War on Terror, George H.W. Bush often appeared as a tyrannical Beloved in mushaʿirah poetry.

[121] This is Katherine Butler Schofield's idea and I am grateful for her phrasing it so perfectly to capture a context difficult to imagine in our age of digital reproduction.

paper was expensive, and singing was something to be treasured, the musha'irah was

strategy for spatial and temporal management in order to demand modes of attention,

listening, and vocal elocution; it was a setting where these sensory postures for

perceiving transient moments of aesthetic delight were fixed in its participants.

My theoretical grounding is informed by a critical historical approach that

prizes what period social actors were doing with sung, rhymed, and metered words. To

an extent, such an approach to music and literature has been of concern to Islamic

theorists since the medieval era. One of the most well known treatises that discusses

listening to music and specifically sung poetry is Hamid al-Ghazzali's (d. 1111) *Kimī'ā al-*

Sa'dat or *The Alchemy of Happiness,* which is a self-help book in Persian, the vernacular in

al-Ghazzali's time, and as a parred down version of his Arabic text *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (*The*

Revival of Religious Sciences). For al-Ghazzali, the context of poetic and musical

perception matters: "For listening (s*amā'*), it is conditional upon time, place, and

companions" (*dar samā' zamān-o makān-o akhwān shart ast*) (Abu Hamid Imam

Muhammad Ghazali 2001). Al-Ghazzali's conception of *samā'* or music implies there is

often a poetic text wedded to melody. His theory about perception and context is

illustrated in an example in which al-Ghazzali relates an anecdote about Abu al-Hassan

Nuri (d. 907) who died when he ran through a cane field barefoot after hearing a particular verse being sung which sent him into an ecstatic rage (Abu Hamid Imam Muhammad Ghazali 2001: 473). This stance creates a formal position for ecstatic listening as it is deployed in an almost utilitarian manner in which Persian-based literary ambiguity is subject to the whims, base or pure, of the listeners. In turn, this Islamic interest in contextualizing listening has profound consequences for the public/semi-public realm of literary circulation in 18th-century North India.

As I have been arguing throughout this dissertation so far, the mushaʿirah renders Persian poetics material at the level of utterance by making the world conform to literary conventions on beauty. So too does mushaʿirah verse at the aural level where poems become psalms and their singers Beloveds. In this chapter, I examine the voice as a sensual means to realize literary conceptions of beauty through an Islamicate legends on music. The mushaʿirah space's melodies used in sung poetic speech conform to lyrical ideas of music's meaningfulness in Mughal India's Persian literary sphere. Additionally, the hierarchies around professional singers and poets produced an overdetermined set of social relations between these two classes of *majlis* participants both interested in the enunciative import of verse. The professional singers who came

to the musha'irahs were seen as having the ability to sing in perfect musical lyricism, so casting the singer as the Beloved himself predetermines how elite poets saw performers as erotic objects. Interestingly, some of these singers were also unlettered, as was the case with two poets from Isfahan named Ghairat and 'Issa documented in Tahir Nasrabadi's work and discussed below. What we find is a cultural rationale for understanding the voice and lyricism as two inextricably linked socio-aesthetic values. To examine this, I first look at melody as a literary and linguistic construct. Secondly, this conception is buttressed by period understandings of music as an Islamic intoxicant and fueled by actual drugs. The third section illustrates how sung verse is an erotic force between poets and the underclass of professional beloveds and singers as both sets of performers were interested in the aesthetic import of recitation and were often hailed as erotic models found in Persian lyricism. The 14th century poet, court chronicler, and musician Amir Khusrao (d. 1325) is popularly credited as saying poetry is a bride and music is the jewels that adorn her. The sentiment reflects a tendency in South Asian Islamic culture of this time period to often understand music in poetic terms and lyricism as music itself. This chapter aims to do the same.

4.1 Historiography of Sung Verse

Urdu speakers today refer to verse singing as *tarannum* or what Regula Qureshi and C.M. Naim have translated as "chanting verse" (Qureshi 1969; Naim 1989). In the context of 18th-century literary and musical cultures, Qureshi's article has a vastly different scope in relation to the present study, but we should briefly touch on some of the historical suppositions she makes in her work for they illustrate widely held aspects Urdu speakers' knowledge of musha'irah lore. That is, she raises some interesting points about the historiography of literary expressive practices in Mughal India, albeit implicitly voiced through her informants.

As to the origins of singing verse in the South Asian literary setting, Qureshi writes, "there is general agreement that originally recitation in Indian mushairas [sic], and their Persian predecessors, was strictly spoken" (Qureshi 1969: 431). As we will discuss, period writers present anecdotes in which Persian poetry was being sung in Isfahan's gatherings in the 17th century, and in 18th-century Delhi poets and others' voices were highly valued when setting verse to melody. To an extent, writers were keenly aware of poets who set their compositions to melody and, as we shall see, even noted which melodies they used. Qureshi also comments that *tarannum* emerged in the

18th century and writes that no contemporary accounts exist. Thankfully, this too is not the case.

The 19th century looms large in popular and scholarly conceptions of Mughal literary culture. In part, this is the product of colonial education policies which effectively ended Persian language patronage and sidelined India's vernaculars (Viswanathan 1989; Macaulay 1999). Also, the *bāz-gasht* or "return" writers gaining traction in early 19th-century Iran recast the 1700s writing as needlessly complex (Bahar 1942; Mohiuddin 1960; Faruqi 2004; Smith 2009). Even poetry written in Iranian and Central Asian lands during the Safavid period was disavowed, and India, which had been the center of Persian literary production since the late 1500s, was now simply a backwater with tangled Persian writing according the new nationalist views. Many of the earliest Hindu reformers wrote in Persian, but by the end of the 19th century anything hinting at Muslim culture, even the Persio-Arabic script used for several Indic vernaculars, was sidelined. Iranian and Indian nationalist movements in their respective "homelands" with the help of colonial-backed history-writing segregated and censored much of the heterogeneity found in 18th-century society, ideas, and literature. These last years of the Safavid and Mughal imperiums, two of the more

inextricably linked "gunpowder empires," seemed to only serve as evidence to legitimate eventual colonial domination. In turn, it is the indigenous elite's version of a rather stultified history which still informs popular conceptions not just of pre-colonial society, but of Urdu literary sociability as a whole. Some literary and cultural histories of Urdu language practices have ignored 18th-century Persian, a hugely important linguistic sphere which buttressed vernacular literary production well into the 20th century in spite of colonial and later nationalist neglect.

As shown throughout this dissertation, I follow the example of recent scholarship which understands the 18th century as a complex transitionary epoch in India that deserves better attention. Many of the social and public institutions propagated by poets, critics, and religious reformers during the 18th century prized social connections that extended beyond the elite realm of the court as they shared anecdotes and stories about classes of people previously thought to be excluded from period cultural histories. Namely, "the popularization 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" (Sharma 2009: 24).

While many of these hierarchal social relationships between the performer and the patron would remain instantiated into the early 20th century, the compendium writing during this time period actually gives a voice to some of the underclass' poets who wrote admired verse and recited in gathering circles. I am not claiming that this would constitute a subaltern history of musical and literary cultures during this time period, as they were semi-elite if not fully elite spheres. Rather I am simply showing that elite writers' connections with laborers, traders, and courtesans were a valuable social route within the mushaʿirah sphere in which the judgment of verse was paramount. On the same note, I do not hold that literary sociability was a great leveler of social difference, for writers were definitely attuned to their colleagues hierarchical position in a vastly stratified Mughal society. The so-called "identity" of writers within compendiums and, by extension the mushaʿirah space, was relevant to the extent that it enlivened literary understanding (see the preceding chapter).

This study advances a social history of multilingual literary production in Mughal India over the 18th century that critically assess the values and norms poets themselves treasured in circles of literary sociability. From an almost ethnographic as opposed to purely literary or nationally oriented linguistic position, this project has

sought to understand the heterogeneity and contradiction found within this era's

public sphere in which poetry and song circulated as communicative discourses. In this

vein, by examining the literary realms of music in India, we can discover the Muslim

conceptions of musical lore that have been erased by the communal and nationalist

intentions of early 20th-century music reformers. Literary discussions of melody and

song show that there was a wider public consciousness about what music meant

according to Islamicate cosmologies.[122] From this perspective, we see how musical ways

of knowing were part of what C.A. Bayly calls the pre-colonial "ecumene" in reference

to this time period's public culture (Bayly 1996). I follow Farhat Hasan's call for a social

history of pre-colonial India in which commoners did have a stake in contributing to

the plurality of communication outside of the Mughal state through sermons, public

literary criticism, and, most notably in the present case, recitational gatherings for

literature (2005: 104). Adding to Hasan and Bayly's theorization on pre-colonial, early

modern publics, I concentrate on the sensory nature of Mughal public society as

documented in period chronicles. I show that these texts chronicle a literary sensorium

---

[122] Contemporary Indian classical music as it was co-opted by upper caste Hindus disavows the Islamic and Persian-based aspects of its heritage (Bakhle 2005). It would be truly novel to imagine a classical music singer invoking David's psalm as would have been done in the 18th century.

reliant on aural, visual, and sensual descriptions presenting a cultural map of Mughal

publics plotted according to Persophone literary coordinates.

The most well-known text documenting Delhi's public life comes from the

southern courtier Dargah Quli Khan's famous travel account of mid-century

entertainment witnessed on the eve of Nadir Shah's invasion in 1739. In addition to

attending brothels and Sufi gatherings, he was an avid mushaʿirah attendee going to

events at several noted poets' homes in addition to the popular graveside gathering of

poet ʿAbd al-Qadir Bedil (d. 1720), a cultural event detailed in the final chapter of the

present work. Quli Khan provides the historical data that refutes some of the

ethnographic assumptions made in Qureshi's work. Quli Khan uses the word *tarannum*

to refer to verse singing, but this in no way illustrates that the 18th century marks the

beginning of verse singing in literary cultures. He notes that the poets and writers did

have a social context to describe melody and the musical import of recited verse. For

instance, the salon impresario Latif Khan (c. 1730s) had musical friends (*harīfān-i khush*

nāʾu) who would sing melodies according to the "degrees of *tarannum" (ba-murātib-i*

tarannum) in addition to cracking jokes and making witty impromptu remarks (Quli

Khan 1993: 70). Also writing about Latif's associates during this time period, the

chronicler ʿAshiqi in his *Nashtar-i ʿIshq* notes the polymath Qizilbash Khan Ummid

(1668-1746) as being "a singer of poetry, nightingale-like, [who] would open the lips of

tarannum" (*bulbulwār bah naghmah-sarāy-yi sukhan lab-i tarannum mī gushūdand*) (2012:

126). Qizilbash Khan Ummid was an Iranian who composed in India's Mughal

vernacular, Urdu, and sang Indian music with the correct South Asian accent,

something few of the many Iranian immigrants could master, according to one writer

(Siraj al-Din ʿAli Khan Arzu 2004: 169; Mushfiq 2011). Ummid left Isfahan to earn money

in India and later became very good friends with a singer named Niʿamat Khan

Sadarang (d. 1746) who often visited Latif Khan's gatherings to sing *khayāl*, a vocal style

that had recently become popular in the court and other nobles' musical gatherings

(Brown 2010). These two characters will serve as paradigmatic poets and musicians in

the examination below, as we recount period writers' stories, anecdotes, and a few of

the verses they heard sung from our characters' lips.

Yet, Ummid was not the only one interested in music or musicians. The poet

Sadiq Mirza knew how to sing the *khayāl* style of Sadarang very well according to one

author (Qasim 2002: 179) and as did the occasional poet Mir Madad Allah (Hasan 1934:

148). Dargah Quli Khan's travel account chronicles a literary sphere interposed with

musical performance, and the courtier himself appears to have had the correct

vocabulary and cursory musical cultivation to speak with appropriate authority about

how reciters sang verse. Many of the poets discussed in 18th-century tazkirahs sang

their compositions, kept company with musicians, and had training in the musical arts

of the time, which included both Persian and Hindustani melodic theories.

Consequently, writers keyed into the ways in which people sang, stuttered, and recited

their verse to the extent that they understood musical training as part of Mughal social

cultivation within certain spheres (Brown 2007b, a; Faruqui 2012; Schofield 2014). In

Mughal and Safavid societies, which were highly concerned with public presentation,

the voice was part of an individual's subjective apparatus for portraying himself or

herself as cultured, civilized, and developed within certain spheres of Mughal

expressive cultures and inextricably linked with literary and religious culture in 1700s

Delhi (Seyller 2000).

Links Between the Musha'irah and Devotional Listening

A popular image held today of South Asian Islamic musical practice can be

found in the devotional singing performed by *qawwāls,* the professional class of

musicians who sang the Persian, Urdu, and Arabic verses that carried popular Islam's

message of inclusiveness and mysticism. The *qawwāls* were a part of the mushaʿirah

culture at the time as parallel literary-minded performers whose interests and goals in

musical recitation and lyrical knowledge would have been recognized as matching the

designs of the poets proper, so to speak. Saints, wealthy patrons, and inclined poets

would often be involved in both musical and poetic gatherings to the point where the

two often overlapped.

In 1700s Delhi, the poet Mir Dard and his father ʿAndalib were famous for

hosting popular devotional gatherings through which they proselytized their particular

religious views on mysticism, poetry, and the nature of prophethood. Mir Dard himself

was a musician and taught disciples musical arts in addition to the correct application

of both Urdu and Persian poetic approaches (Homayra Ziad 2007, 2010). Later in the

century Sarab Sukh Divanah and Khwajah Basit founded their own circles in Faizabad

and later Lucknow. Sarab Sukh Divanah was a Hindu from Lahore that who kept

company with Lucknow's poets and hosted them in his home. He also lived in Delhi for

a time where he likely had a connection with Mir Dard. Bhagwan Das Hindi kept in

contact with one Divanah's students named Medi Lal Bimar, a *Rastogī* (*kshātriyā*), would

recite poetry with so much pain and emotion that tears would stream from both his eyes (Hindi 1958: 30).[123]

Khwajah Basit (c. 1780s) was a notable character for his unusual missionary zeal after adopting the Shiʿi interpretation of Islam and patronizing poetry and Sufi circles populated by *qawwāls* and poets. His father, Muhammad Jaʿfar Khan, was the brother of Khan-i Dauran Samsam al-Daulah, the Mughal bureaucrat killed by Nadir Shah's forces, some would say due to Nizam al-Mulk's duplicity in the 1739 battle of Karnal. These two had some social standing in Mughal society at the time, so it was quite a surprise when Jaʿfar and Basit converted to Shiʿism. They left the popular, reform-minded Naqshbandi brotherhood to which Gulshan, Mir Dard, Mazhar Jan-i Janan, and eventually Nasir ʿAli were pledged (Umar 1993, 1998).

Basit picked up his taste for Sufi music and devotional listening from his father who patronized Sufi listening sessions in Delhi. Jaʿfar had been involved in a dispute with a Multani preacher over the legality of devotional listening sessions during the reign of Farrukh Siyar (r. 1713-1719) when the said preacher declaimed Jaʿfar's

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[123] In 1768 Medi Lal left for Ajmer as a *faqīr* and from there it was rumored that he set out for a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina (Hindi 1958: 30)

traditions from the pulpit of the central Mughal mosque in Delhi's walled city of Shahjahanabad which started a small Shiʿi-Sunni riot (Umar 1993: 187, 202, 236).

In spite of this controversy, Basit carried on the listening sessions begun by his father in Delhi where Dargah Quli Khan visited his Sufi gatherings, noting his ability to compose *qawwāli* (*dar fan-i qawwāli turfah mahārit dārad*) (Quli Khan 1999: 100). He was eventually invited to Lucknow by Shujaʿ al-Daulah (r. 1753-1775), where he held monthly Sufi gatherings (*majlis-i fuqrā*) on Thursday and Sunday evenings (Hindi 1958: 37). Mir Hasan (1727-1786), who was also Shiʿi, met Basit sometime in Lucknow most likely and chronicled his gatherings in a small *qasīdah*:

<div dir="rtl">

مگر یاں ہے تو جائے خواجہ باسط
کہ تھی موزوں برائے خواجہ باسط

رکھے حق اس کو یہ وہ آستاں ہے
کہ دہلی جس کی دہلی کا نشان ہے

خوشا یہ ذوق و شوق عندلیباں
سرود مجلس و حال عزیزاں

نمونوں میں یہ ہے ہندوستاں کے
ورق ہے یہ مرقع کا وہاں کے

</div>

If there be one place, it is the abode of Khwajah Basit,
Which was simply perfect because of Khwajah Basit.

May God preserve him and his hermitage entrance,
For even the threshold is a symbol of Delhi.[124]

Bravo! Oh, the tastes and desires of the nightingales,
Oh, the assembly's songs and friends' rapture!

Of all exemplars, he is one of Hindustan's best.
He is a page from that place's memorial.
(Mir Hasan 1977)

After Basit's death sometime in the late 1700s, the inheritor of his spiritual lineage, Mir

Nasir (c .1790s) maintained the gatherings, which continued to attract a "swarm of

God's creation" (*hajūm-i khalq-i Allah*); Bhagwan Das Hindi was often among the crowd,

so he writes (Bhagwan Das Hindi 1958: 32). Additionally, Sher Afgan Khan Basiti, who

had been embroiled in the battles of the warring Delhi poets, eventually became a

disciple of Basit and married into Basit's family, taking on the name *bāsitī* has his *nisbat*

to show his allegiance to his spiritual master and father-in-law (Hindi 1958: 32; Khalil

1978: 27). Mus'hafi was closely affiliated with Basit's circles and notes that the area

where he kept his hermitage or *khānqāh* came to be known as Basit's Hill (*khwājah bāsit*

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[124] Here Mir Hasan is playing with the term *dihlī* which can mean both the city of Delhi and threshold, as in *dihlīz* or *dihurī.* We have to remember that Basit is the saint to whom Sabit's former disciple Afgan Khan took a pledge after also aligning himself with the Iranian emigre Hazin, Sabit and late Sabat's nemesis.

kā tīlā). Mus'hafi also mentions a poet named Miyan Nasir al-Din Nasir who he had

known in Delhi and reconnected with in Lucknow. This could be the same Nasir

maintaining Basit's gatherings given the connections between the poetic and Sufistic

circles.

Yet Sarb Sukh, Mir Dard, and ʿAndalib's lineage begins much earlier through

their connection to Saʿd Allah Gulshan (d. 1728), a fellow naqshabani and disciple of

Bedil. Due to Gulshan's musical and poetic abilities, accomplished musicians and

singers in Delhi's early 1700s considered the poet and Sufi to be "an Amir Khusrao of

the age," referencing the 14th-century poet and polymath popularly credited with

creating Indian classical music almost single-handedly (Khushgu 1959: 167). Gulshan

actually died in ʿAndalib and the young Dard's home. Unfortunately, there are no

anecdotes describing Gulshan's singing or musical performances even though his

connection to music was something many tazkirahs noted. The only tidbit that hints at

how Gulshan was revered as a musician concerns celebrations held in his honor after he

died. Like Bedil, when Gulshan passed away, he too was revered as a saint by his

followers and friends. The famous court singer Niʿamat Khan Sadarang (d. 1746), whom

we mentioned above in connection to his friendship with Delhi's poets and whom we

will discuss below in detail, organized festivities every year at Gulshan's grave to commemorate him in an *ʿurs,* or death anniversary, celebrating a saint's union with God. Yet today, Gulshan's grave has been all but forgotten and instead he is solely remembered as the a Sufi mystic who supposedly urged one the earliest Urdu poets, Wali Muhammad Wali (d. 1707/8), to begin crafting vernacular verse according to Persian literary conventions.

While there do not appear to be stories of Gulshan's musical performances, period writers do record mushaʿirah anecdotes. To earn his living, Saʿd Allah Gulshan took up a post as a local court appointed custodian for the *Zīnat al-Masājid*, a mosque built on the Yamuna's banks by emperor Aurangzeb ʿAlamgir's literary-minded sister Zinat al-Nisa Begam (d. 1721).[125] The mosque served as the living quarters and gathering-site for several poets during the 18th-century.[126] Every Saturday Gulshan

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[125] Both Mir Taqi Mir and Qaʾim Chandpuri note that a poet named Sharf al-Din Mazmun (d. ~1745) followed Khushgu's advice and also made the Zinat al-Masajid his home; he must have taken part in Gulshan and ʿAndalib's gatherings after coming to Delhi from a qasbah town near Agra (Qaʾim 52, Mir 34). A descendent of the Sufi mystic Farid Shakar Ganj (1173-1266), Mazmun took instruction from Khan-i Arzu, and was a lively companion in Delhi's gatherings according to both Qaʾim and Mir, living out his days in the riverside mosque. At one point all his teeth fell out from a some kind of inflammatory disease. When he started going to gatherings again, Arzu took to calling him "The Toothless Poet" (*shāʿir-i bedānah*) (Mir 1972: 34).

[126] A recent article mistranslates this as Gulshan living of of the kichhari or smattering of donations for the mosque. This is an enticing concept, but incorrect: *kachharī muqarrarah keh barāʾī masjidiyān muʿin bud mī namūd.*

held a well-attended mushaʿirah for the local poets (*ba-roz shambah aksar sāhib sukhanān jamaʿ shudah mushāʿirah mī kardand*). Muhammad Jaʿfar Jurʾat (c. 1740s), a professional soldier and land grant holder in Muhammad Shah's court (r. 1719-1748), came and read some well-received poems at the mosque one Saturday including this one which references the setting:

رطوبتی است هوا را چنان بموسم گل
که سنبل خط جانان دمدزدانه خال

> With this rose's weather there is some moisture in the air,
> For the down on the Beloved's face is like a hyacinth and his mole steals your breath. (Khushgu 1959: 206)

It seems when the literati visited Gulshan in the mosque on the banks of the Yamuna, the scenic environment and Gulshan's name (rose garden) necessitated that poets use the ample blossoming imagery in Persian and Urdu verse to reference the saint and his name. Bindraban Das Khushgu, one of the attendees who witnessed Jaʿfar Jurʾat's verse above, also wrote a poem about visiting Shah Gulshan's gatherings:

اگر آب و هوائی گل زمین شعر خواهی بین
فضائی مسجد بیگم کنار آب جمنا را

> If you want to take in the air and water of the rose garden of poetry
> [Go to into] the environs of the Begum's mosque on the edge of the Yamuna's waters. (Ibid.)

327

According to Anne Marie Schimmel, the poet and mystic Muhammad Nasir ʿAndalib (1693-1759) (the father of Mir Dard 1721-1785), kept up Shah Gulshan's mosque mushaʿirahs after he died, before his son finally took them over (Schimmel 1976: 55).[127] As Mir proudly notes in his *Nikāt*, the discord in Gulshan's former mushaʿirah as Dard inherited it, led the saint to pass it on to Mir.

To understand Gulshan's musical and poetic contribution to Delhi's literary sphere it helps to understand his ustad, Bedil about whom we do find occasional musical references. This hugely popular poet had been almost universally revered for his poetic and mystical knowledge, to the point where certain segments of Delhi's populace worshipped him as a saint after he died with a yearly festival on the anniversary of his death. Bedil was also an adept singer. Several writers attest to his ability in music and one of his disciples records an erotic verse he would often sing in a loud warble. The lines were a verse in a quatrain meter by a 14th century Tughlaq era poet Jamal al-Din Muhammad bin Husam (d. 1326),[128] which Bedil would flirtatiously recast as a *mustazād* or a tail-rhymed poem. The lines after the elipses are Bedil's

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[127] Gulshan died in ʿAndalib's home when Mir Dard was about eight years old. Arzu was also there and records his passing (Arzu 2004: 1084, 1369).

[128] A poet from the city Khvaf in the heart of Khurasan who had gained some fame in Herat before immigrating to India during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq (1325-1351).

interjections (see Appendix M): "Your 'shape' may not be restricted by the confines of the shirt … otherwise, they shall sew," Khushgu tells us Bedil would sing, "Because of your 'stature,' the shirt is totally drenched from the tulip … and from the budding 'hat.'"[129] One of Bedil's students was a dancing girl named Babri Rindi (see Appendix R) and he revered a musician named Ahmad ʿIbrat to the point where when the *Ghachak* or spike-fiddle player died, Bedil cried for days (Khushgu 1959: 78).

It is important to note that the status of Bedil and Gulshan's as poets and musicians was far from unique. Delhi in the 1700s was populated by a class of poets, in particular Urdu-writing poets, and professional singers who dabbled in both artistic realms. The writer Mir Hasan importantly notes in his compendium *Shuʿarā-yi Hindī* or *The Hindi Language Poets* that Indian singers would sing poet Zuhur al-Din Hatim's ghazals set to music (*aksar ghazalha-yi ou dar mausiqi naghmah-i surāʾīān-i hindī mī khwānand*) (Mir Hasan 1940: 98). Likewise, the Urdu poet Sauda was knowledgable in music (ibid.:82) and so was Islamic reformer Mazhar Jan-i Janan who was known for his verse in Persian and Urdu (Umar 1993:123). The poet Mir Soz, who would perform in the imperial court, could sing better than he could speak (Qaʾim 1966: 131; Mir 1972:

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[129] The lines are full of erotic imagery. *Andām* is "body" or "member" in the sexual sense, and *kulāh* can also mean "penis."

88). Mir Madad Allah would occasionally write verse and could sing the *khayāl* style popularized by the famous singer Niʿmat Khan Sadarang who keeps appearing in this context (Mir Hasan 1940: 148) as could Rafiʿ Sauda's student Sadiq ʿAli Khan Mirza (Qasim 2002: 179). Fidawi, who was also called Mirza Bicchu (Lord Scorpion), played the sitar (Mir Hasan 1940: 121) as did the poet Jurʾat (ibid.: 45). Finally, Mir Hasan himself, who recorded most of these facts, had some association with music through his knowledge of Shiʿi Islam's *marsīyah* (lament) singing (Qasim 2002: 54).

In the context of literary sociability and recitational gatherings, these musical abilities were obviously talents which distinguished them as paragons of masculine and social refinement. Musical knowledge or the ability to perform was not something universally scorned across all sections of society. In the rarified setting of the *majlis,* where all momentary arts were relished, even the elite were cultivating musical habits with friends. In the mushaʿirah setting, not only were poets attuned to musical modes of expression, but they also aimed to propagate the musical arts even if they thought some of their colleagues couldn't carry a tune in a bucket.

Voice and the Seduction of Psalms

In the competitive spirit of the literary salon, the voice was sometimes viewed with ambivalence. This was not a product of ethical concerns or religious mores, but rather due to music's ability to seduce the listener and also capacity to mask bad poetry.[130] The Hindu poet and historian Bindraban Das Khushgu (d. 1756) was a good friend of Gulshan's and a disciple of Bedil. He had a friend whose satirical acumen and ability to craft sayings illustrates poets' tendency to interpose the aural and poetic realms in the musha'irah context. Mo'in Lazzat (c. early 1700s) was barely a poet though he clearly had literary talent and a sharp social sense marked by his uncanny ability to entertain his friends with his "perfectly mischievous nature" (Khushgu 2012:608). Lazzat wrote several small tracts; one was called the *Lazzat Nāmah* in which he kept a record of his axioms on "things to guard against" and "things to be enjoyed." On examples of the former he writes: "being unsettled every morning that there is little time, God protect us!" or "a prayer caller or a singer with a bad voice, God protect us!"

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[130] This view of music masking poor verse still holds true today. Qureshi cites a verse by 20th century Urdu Josh Malihabadi , who despised his contemporary musha'irah scene for its growing religious conservatism. He states:

Singing away in the battle fields of the musha'irah,	گا گا کے مشاعروں کے میدانوں میں
Poets are just chewing up the cud of praise.	تعریف کے گھاس چر رہے ہیں شعرا
Their ghazals are driving daggers in to my chest a little,	سینے پے غزل ذرا چلاتے ہیں چھری
They make up for their verses' lack with little ditties.	کرتے ہیں سروں سے شعروں کی خانہ پری

and "sleeping in a bedouin's house, going to the door with the call of nature, and having dogs follow you out, God protect us!" For examples of his latter sayings, he quips: "a delight: drinking wine when desired," or "a delight: getting together for fun," and "a delight: hearing '*Allahu-akbar*'[131] daily."

There are many observations and commentaries in his lists of preferred enjoyments and recommended avoidances revealing that Lazzat was a keen observer of the everyday intricacies of mid-18th-century life with a comedian's eye. One of the curious sayings that Khushgu recorded from Lazzat's *Lazzat Nāmah* illustrates the importance of the voice in the Mughal town square. Lazzat's maxim reads, "The poetry of the preacher and the clerk takes orders from the singer" (*shiʿr-i munshī wa mullā hukm-i khwānandagī-sāz dārad*). In the hierarchy of the Persophone literary economy there were many types of people who composed poetry but few earned their bread from verse alone. However, in 1700s Delhi, which was at the height of its Persian literary production, many people who were not poets, or perhaps not sufficiently initiated into lyricism's conventions and technicalities, would try their hand at verse. Compendium writers in both the earlier and latter parts of the century note friends

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[131] This one of the most recognizable phrases in the call to prayer, a sound marker regularly shaping the early modern acoustic landscape.

who would occasionally cast a verse or two but never considered themselves proper writers of poetry. The *munshī* or secretary and the preacher or *mullā* are two such people often viewed as amateur poets who were popularly thought to write substandard verse and Lazzat's saying implies that it could only be appreciated if it were sang by an accomplished singer.[132]

Lazzat's statement seems to capture a popular social notion about the function of melody carrying poetic ideas. As noted in the last chapter, Garami Kashmiri (d.1743), the outlandish poet-rake who made no distinction between religions, acquired a popular following with his charisma and bombastic vocal abilities. One writer dismissively noted that only those with no appreciation for good singing seemed to enjoy Garami's stage antics, which another writer compared to popular Kashmiri street singers (Khushgu 1959: 234; Dargah Quli Khan 1999: 84). However, this type of performative drama in recitation was a quality that earned Garami the hearts of his listeners (*nez dil az dast mī dādand*) (Khushgu 1959: 336). He would often appear in the

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[132] Writing on the contemporary musha'irah setting C.M. Naim notes, "A 'musha'irah poet' with a pleasing *tarannum* does not have to worry much about the quality of his poetry, or even his inventory," referring to the distinction Urdu speakers often make between a poet popular with the masses cheapened by musha'irah performance as opposed to a serious writer whose verse is some how above musha'irah attendees' vacuous praise (Naim 1989). A 2010 *Bazm-i Sahārā* article makes similar assertions about singing in the context of the musha'irah's general cultural decrepitude (Mohib Ahmad 2007).

garden of a Mir Musharraf for a festival where he would sit in one of the gazebos with his students and conduct poetry recitation to catch the eyes of the Delhi's onlookers (ibid.).[133] Qadrat Allah Shauq in his *Tabqāt al-Shuʿarā* (c. 1774) writes the sitar-playing poet named Fidawi who would try to distinguish himself (*ba-wasaʿ-i khud-tarashi*) by obliviously reciting with the drama of an epic poem reader (*ba-taur Shah Nāmah [khwān] ba-āwāz-i karkhat*) to the point where ignorant listeners would praise him no matter what he said (*sāmʿān-i nafaham lab-i tahsīn wa āfrīn mī kashwand*) (1971: 275).[134]

As discussed in the previous section, we can plainly see the cultural logic for valuing the voice. In some ways this does educate us on how poets and others heard melody. In early modern Iran, Central Asia, and India, compendium writers like Tahir Nasrabadi (c. 1680), Daulat Shah Samarqandi (c. 1495), and Taqi Awhadi (c.1620) occasionally document on poets who recited according to the conventions of the era's musical knowlege. In addition, they make a point to chronicle the semi-professional

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[133] Garami also had a tendency to starts fights in recitational gathering. He would get so passionate about his points that the veins in his neck would bulge out and the other participants had to humor him with feigned praise in order to keep things from getting out of hand (Dargah Quli Khan 1999:84).

[134] Reciting epic poetry was a large fixture of the public literary sphere in both Iran and India. In Iran coffeehouses were often the stages for reciters to perform the *Shāh Nāmah*, a history of pre-Islamic Persia. More work remains to be done on this among other epic genres that early modern listeners regularly enjoyed.

singers and instrumentalists who had been initiated into Persophone lyrical conventions while also noting poets who were amateur musicians. Even from the initial years of early modernity in Iran and India, there were cultural and social expectations that poets with adequate musical training and a sense of melody would cast their recitations into melodic contours in fashion at the time. Again, Bedil, who keeps emerging as a culture arbiter for this era, illustrates this preference in a couplet:

به نظم و نثر مناز از لطافت تقریر
زبور معجزه‌ای دارد از خوش الحانی

Don't boast in prose and poetry about subtly of speech;
David's psalms were miraculous because of their pleasing melodies.

Bedil's verse parallels period writers' conceptions about rhetoric and the seduction of music.[135] The verse implied that well-hewn speech has the possibility of attaining the sublime through melody. Subtly of speech was something prized by the literati, but pairing verse with melody (*khush-alhānī*) changes the stakes for the musha'irah audience since melody can seduce any living being according to Islamicate lore on music.

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[135] Bedil's musical tropes are productive instances for understanding literary society's view of music. In a contrasting verse he says:

تا چند خراشد اثر لاف گلویت
داوود نخواهی شدن از نغمه سرایی

How long did the effects of bragging scratch your throat?
As a singer, you would be no David.

In Judeo-Christian and Islamic cosmologies David was a prophet famous for his innate and natural musical abilities, a sentiment recorded in the Qurʾan:

> And Solomon was David's heir. He said: "O ye people! We have been taught the speech of birds, and on us has been bestowed (a little) of all things: this is indeed Grace manifest (from Allah)."[136]

For Persian lyric writers, this was a particularly powerful image given the array of garden and bird images found in overabundance in literary imagery. Namely, the nightingale or *bulbul* presents itself as a standard lyric trope in not just Persian but many literary traditions as it indexes the poet's recitation. In fact, the nightingale often sings the prophet David's psalms as illustrated in a verse by Hafiz which clearly references the Qurʾan verse cited above (d. 1390):

<div dir="rtl">

چو گل سوار شود بر هوا سلیمان وار
سحر که مرغ درآید به نغمه داوود

</div>

Thus the rose rides the wind like Solomon;
It's the morning [breeze] that brought the bird with David's melody.

Similarly, Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1327) uses the image of natural music and seduction to allude to the power of David's music in Persian-based aesthetics:

<div dir="rtl">

بلبلان را مست گردان مطربان را شیرگیر

</div>

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[136] Verse sixteen from book twenty seven "The Ants," translation by ʿAbd Allah Yusuf ʿAli:

<div dir="rtl">

وَوَرِثَ سُلَيْمَانُ دَاوُودَ ۖ وَقَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ عُلِّمْنَا مَنطِقَ الطَّيْرِ وَأُوتِينَا مِن كُلِّ شَيْءٍ ۖ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْمُبِينُ [٢٧:١٦]

</div>

<div dir="rtl">تا که درسازند با هم نغمه داوود را</div>

The nightingales are bringers of intoxication and the singers are lion tamers,
Since they have colluded with each other over the song of David.

In short, according to Persian literary initiates in the early modern era, any music could be linked with the prophet David who sang what Annemarie Schimmel calls the "Davidian song" (Schimmel 1992: 271-6). In poetic conceptions of music, the ghazal-singer or reciter is perhaps even more talented than the nightingale. Singing is pleasing, but singing ghazals, perfectly balancing music and verse, is an even greater miraculous feat. From the classical period, poet Awhad al-Din Awhadi Maragahai (1271–1338) illustrates this idea:

<div dir="rtl">زبور عشق نوازی نه کار هر مرغیست
بیا و نوگل این بلبل غزل خوان باش</div>

Playing love's psalm is not the work of every bird;
Come, oh spring bud, make this nightingale a ghazal singer![137]

Aside from expounding on the role the nightingale singing to the rose in a "Davidian melody," musical allusions seem to illustrate the social context for ghazal

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[137] Wali Dakani has a verse which echoes this sentiment:

<div dir="rtl">اے ولی اس گل بدن کے عشق میں
شغل بلبل ہے غزل خوانی ہنوز</div>

Hey Wali, since falling in love with that rose-bodied Beloved
Now the nightingale's job is to recite ghazals. (Wali 1982: 159).

performance as well. With metered speech and rhyme, the rhythmic elements of speech are already bound to verse. Fittingly, the musical elements of Hafiz's Persian works have long been a topic under literary historians' consideration and in the Urdu context literary (Lewis 2002). However, I would like to take this a step further by examining parallels between the musical aspects of recitational practices listed in 18th-century tazkirahs and the literary tropes on musicality in Persian lyrical conventions. That is, melodies sung in the mushaʿirah space during the 18th-century reference the "Davidian song" at both the musical and poetic levels.

4.2 Eaters of Melody

Late 17th-century Isfahan is the first setting for this examination of the parallel practices of poetic and musical singing. The poet and chronicler Tahir Nasrabadi lived a very social life in the coffeehouses and bazaars of mid-17th century Isfahan where he was an active social fixture in Safavid public life. He was also addicted to opium, tobacco and alcohol. The latter two he gave up but missed the warm sociability they fostered. He would never kick his opium habit. From his position as an impresario of semi-elite sociability, Nasrabadi chronicled an important moment in Iran's late-Safavid

literary sphere in which the upper echelons of Safavid society mixed with lower status labors and professionals in coffeehouses and over verse recitation.

For instance, Mulla Ghairat Hamdani (c. 1680s), an illiterate poet-singer, was a personal friend of Nasrabadi's. By Nasrabadi's estimation, Ghairat was adept at writing in the style of old masters (*tatabbuʿ-i qudumā*) and showed no lack in ability to cast ghazals with his peers (*az aqrān dar ghazal-hā-yi tarh kamī na-dārad*). We have to remember that there was an ongoing literary discussion on the "modern" verse as compared to the ancient style. Ghairat says about himself that first he had been a mere town crier, "but nonetheless I was a contender on the battlefields of literature even though I had no connection with poetry," he tells Nasrabadi.[138] "While dreaming, I had a vision and became cultured" (*nazar yāftam wa mauzūn shudam*) (Nasrabadi 2000: 458).[139] As Ghairat mentioned to Nasrabadi, while he had vocal abilities on account of

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[138] Persophone society made distinctions between "men of the sword" and "men of the pen," but poets often used martial imagery when describing literary sociability given the competition between poets for recognition and patronage. So too does the imagery of the literary market abound in period writers' descriptions.

[139] Confirming his illiteracy, Nasrabadi records an *īhām* or double entendre Ghairat wrote about himself:

بی سواد همدانی ز سواد همدان

[He is] an illiterate Hamdanian from the limits of Hamdan.
The joke lies in the word sawād meaning literate or being able to read or write black marks on a page. In the *īhām* word play Ghairat fiddles with the word which can also mean the outlying parts of a city.

being a town crier, they were formally put to use when Ghairat learned how to

construct poems in a dream's vision. In Nasrabadi's poetry circles in Isfahan Ghairat

became well known for singing this line from a ghazal:

<div dir="rtl">

ز تأثیر فغان جا در دل افکار خود کردم

چو آتش جا به سنگ از ناله‌های زار خود کردم

</div>

> From of the effect of the idol house I crafted my poetic thoughts in my heart;
> Like a fire temple, I spread out my complaints on the stone.

The line's use of double entendre makes for a delightful reading where Ghairat plays

with the Lover's idea of lamenting and wailing in the idol house or fire temple while

also magnifying the Sufi idea of eliminating the ego. That the line was sung by a self-

taught illiterate poet and Nasrabadi remembers Ghairat's melody is significant on

several accounts.

From a historiographic perspective, it's not surprising that Nasrabadi would

give credit to Ghairat who was a source of information on Isfahan's popular poetry

circles. Occasionally, he helped to clarify who composed particular lines (ibid.: 359).

This is an interesting detail given that we know Ghairat was unlettered. He was a

regular attendee in Isfahan's poetry gatherings and we can presume that this poet-

singer got this knowledge first hand or heard it from another reciter since he could not

have read it anywhere. Also, Nasrabadi himself was fairly eclectic in the way he included poets clearly outside the upper classes of Safavid society, a quality carried over in the 18th century in Walih Daghistani's tazkirah among others.[140] For instance, a small time retailer (*khurdah farosh*) named Masih, who went by the pen name ʿIssa or "Jesus," and may have been a Christian, appears in Nasrabadi's lists and was probably a regular at the coffeehouses. He notes that ʿIssa was "like Ghairat" in that he "did not read a thing," but still composed poems "that were not empty of essences" (Muhammad Tahir Nasrabadi 2000).[141]

But there is an important detail that Nasrabadi records when describing this famous verse. Ghairat sang the verse to the melodic contour or mode call *dogāh nīshāburik.* This is an 18th-century classificatory term for a type of musical scale, mode,

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[140] Writing in the mid-1700s, Muhammad ʿAli Hazin in his Tazkirah-i Hazīn records a poet named Saʾid Qasab (Saʾid the butcher) who, in spite of being unlettered, had a *dīwān* of 20,000 verses with no mistake in word usage or rhyme, and his verses were equal in beauty to the verses of his literate contemporaries. According to Hazin, Qasab would go to mushaʿirahs in Isfahan and recite his verse where the famous 17th-century *tāzah-goʾī* poet Saʾib Tabrizi heard him and praised his verse. Saʾid later stopped his profession as a butcher before retiring to Mashhad where he died and was buried. This remains to be explored but it is possible that Hazin retrieved this information from Saʾib's *bayāz* or pocket diary, scribed copies of which were in circulation at the time (Muhammad ʿAli Hazin 1955: 120).

[141] A poem by ʿIssa that seems to allude to his profession is tasty and worth noting:

<div dir="rtl">

در روزگار حق نمک کم نمی شود
چینی هنوز یاد ز فغفور می کند

</div>

In the toil of truth, there shall be no shortage of salt;
Even now sugar from China remembers its emperor.

or tonal arrangement found in Safavid-era art music. Yet, this was not the only poet Nasrabadi knew who sang his compositions while also noting which melodic contours the said poet used in technical musical language. For instance, the poet Beram Beg Sama‘ or "Listener" (c. 1680s?) had "a strong connection with the science of music and the arrangement of melodies" (*dar ‘ilm-i mausīqī wa nazm-i tasānīf khelī rabt dāsht*) (460). One of Sama‘'s more famous poems was "spun" into the melodies *zābulī* and *usūl* (*dar naghmah-yi zābulī wa usūl ū far bastah*):

قامتت سروی ز سرو ستان نازه
چشم مستت به اشارهٔ دل نوازه

    Your cyprian figure is more attractive than the cypress garden itself;
    Your intoxicating glance is bestowed by a gesture of the heart.

Nasrabadi is specific about the poem, its composer, how it was performed, and the melodic colors its singer used, *zābulī* and *usūl*. The poem is relatively plain and clearly relies on the classical images as deployed in the "old" style. For Nasrabadi to have remembered it with the melodies' classification is significant and cues us in to the musical way in which period writers heard verse.

The practice of poets singing their verse in the musha‘irah was very familiar to the Indian context as well. During this era, Delhi was the center of the Persian literary world. Throughout the early modern era, anyone educated in Persian and in search of

342

patronage could venture to the Mughal capital to take up posts in the literary economy as secretaries, poets, chroniclers, or any position that required wielding a pen in the imperial bureaucracy. Additionally, Nasrabadi's compendium was widely read among Indian tazkirah writers. The poet, philologist, and language historian Siraj al-Din Khan-i Arzu (d. 1756) copied Nasrabadi's entries on Ghairat and Sama' into his own compendium *Majma' al-Nafā'is,* also noting that Ghairat sang his famous poem in the *dogāh maqām* (Arzu 2004: 1181). Arzu essentially copies Nasrbadi's notes on Sama' but does not record his sung verse or make note of its melodic aspects. "*Dogāh*" refers to a species of mode or melodic shape (*maqām*) that was a popular tonal configuration for setting ghazals and other sung verses in both Indian and Iran during the 17th and 18th centuries.

Arzu's younger relative, the Urdu poet Mir Taqi Mir (d. 1810), noted several occasions in which singers were employing types of melodic contours in their recitations. When visiting the dervish Ehsan Allah with his adopted uncle, a wandering *sayyid*, Mir notes that an attractive young man with a trained voice (*sir-i āhangī*) traipsed by with a *tanburā* (a lute-like instrument) on his shoulder and a gold hoop in

343

his ear. Ehsan Allah, who was smitten, asked Mir's uncle to call the boy over and he

spontaneously sang this verse set to the mode of *maqām* of *dogāh*:

بیاکه عمر عزیزم بجستجوئی تو رفت
ز دل نرفتی و جانم ز آرزوئی تو رفت

Come—my precious life went in search of you;
You didn't leave my heart and, desiring you, life left me.

The singer later returned with a bowl of poisoned milk which Ehsan Allah

unfortunately drank and died an agonizing death later that night after the singer made

off with his money. C.M. Naim comments in his translation of this anecdote that the

poem's recitation within the narrative is not designed for verisimilitude and instead

casts the Sufi Ehsan Allah into the role of the paradigmatic Lover with the singer taking

on the character of the always-treacherous Beloved (Naim 1999: 46). Yet, Mir does give

us a glimpse into a known vocal practice of the time: as in Iran, verse in India was often

recited according to the melodic contour *dogāh.* Naim finds it novel that a street singer

would be singing an Iranian *maqām* (melodic contour). Other sources in India attest to

the widespread use of Persian modes and it seems Mir is simply stating an aesthetic

expectation about which melodies are used to craft verse. Interestingly Mir relied on

344

Siraj al-Din Khan-i Arzu's *Chiragh al-Hidayat* and *Majmaʿ al-Nafāʾis* when writing his memoirs as evidenced by stories and definitions both texts carry. The detail on the *dogāh maqām* or *pardah* (mode)—to use Mir's word—could have been lifted from Arzu re-telling Nasrabadi's entry on Ghairat who, as we know, also sang in *dogāh* or from Arzu's dictionary *Chirāgh al-Hidāyat*, which provides definitions of several melodic contours.

Yet, Mir presents us another occasion in which he was keen to show how tuned in he was to the utility of certain melodies in singing verse. While back in Delhi with Riʿayat Khan, a general in Mewar's Rajput army, another young male singer was performing on a terrace during a literary gathering when Riʿayat Khan asked Mir to teach the boy some of his *Rekhtah* or Urdu verses so the young singer could set them to the *maqām* or mode known as *bastah*. Mir begrudgingly complied and gave the boy a few verses, but in the end it didn't sit well with him and he stopped venturing to Riʿayat Khan's gatherings (Mir 1999: 72). Naim again points out that the *maqām bastah* is listed as *bastah nigār*—a similar, if not the same mode—in Arzu's *Chirāgh al-Hidāyat*. Could Mir have been translating singers' modal choices into Persian terminology as opposed to employing the Indian names for melodic contours? Why didn't he just use the names of Indian modes or *rāg*s? Or was this another moment in which he insisted on using Arzu's

terminology from the dictionary? My hunch is that Mir was simply stating an aesthetic social fact about how Mughal-era poets conceived of poems' musical settings. *Dogāh* was one of the *maqāms* any number of ghazal-singers at the time used to set verse. While anecdotes describing poets' modal melodic choices are rare they do hold to similar descriptive qualities seen in earlier Safavid-era tazkirahs as well.

Significantly, the *maqāms* listed in tazkirahs actually tell us something about how recited poetry sounded for mushaʿirah audiences, and how poetry was performed and in fact they conform to a larger social logic that undergirds Islamicate understandings of music within the literary sphere. Since these writers provide descriptions of the melodic types, we can surmise the tonal "color" of what mushaʿirah audiences were hearing. In some treatises, *dogāh, nīshaburik,* or *bastah* are sub-melodies, or *goshah* of *Husainī* an old *maqām* or *āvāz* which was one of the main seven modes used in Persian music theory. Unfortunately, much of Persian and Hindustani musical terminology does not remain consistent enough over large stretches of time to draw a direct association between the modes or scales historical writers were describing and what we might hear today in a contemporary performance. Yet there are some intriguing parallels worth exploring.

Interestingly, each of the seven modes indexes a prophet from the Islamic

cosmology according to Persian music reformer and composer Ruhallah Khaleqi. For

instance, the mode *rāst*, the first mode in the sequence, indexes Adam according to

Khaleqi's assessment (Khaleqi 1982: I:62).[142] *Husainī* was linked with the prophet David

and his psalms, providing an affect thought to satiate a heart wounded in separation

from Beloved (ibid.).[143] The melody is somewhat akin to the Phrygian mode in European

music theory which would be notated as: C, D♭, E♭, F, G, A♭, B♭.

While this connection is tentative at best, it is fitting that poets would choose a

melody that perhaps indirectly references the prophet David, given his paradigmatic

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[142] Ruh Allah Khaleqi list of the seven modes in Safavid musical system and their associated prophets:

rāst	Adam
ʿushāq	Moses
ʿirāq	Joseph
kūchek	Jonah
husainī	David and Abraham
nauroz-i ʿarab	Abraham
rahāwī	Ishmael

[143] The terminology for Persian music theory was not codified until the early 20th century. Many of the terms classifying modes and their antecedent forms vary between tracts across the early modern era in India and Iran. Bruno Nettl states, that this variation in terminology and style "illustrates the separate histories of melodic materials and the terminology associated with them, as well as the variety of life-cycles of the components of the radif"—radif is the modern term for the musical improvisation of melodic units based on the melodic extrapolation of the seven main modes of Persian music (Nettl 2004).

stature as a poet and musician in the Islamicate context.[144] In the musha'irah space where the world is shaped according to Persophone lyrical tropes, we see how at even the musical level the intricacies and associations of Indo-Persian poetic knowledge inform this process. When poets sang in the musha'irah in Delhi's 18th century, they were actually performing the "Davidian songs" referenced in poetic convention and Islamicate lore on music.

After the early 18th century, these musical references in poets' descriptions all but disappear. Yet there is a hint that this particular melodic color remained an associative literary and musical device into the mid-1800s. In the late 19th century, a writer named Altaf Husain Hali (d. 1914) wrote a biography of the famous poet Asad Allah Khan Ghalib (d. 1869) where he records a musha'irah anecdote that gives a

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[144] In fact, 18th-century poets and classical era writers like Rumi use the names of melodies as poetic devices within poems themselves. Rumi has several poems naming the twelve auxiliary modes derived from the original seven (see *Dīwān-i Shams*). The poet and secretary Anand Ram Mukhlis cites several *maqāms* in his dictionary compiled in the early 1700s. Under his heading for usūl he cites a poem by court poet Abu Talib Salim Kashani (1581/5-1651) as an example of the way Persian poets use musical terminology "for striking and delightful effect" (*bah ma'nī-yi harkat wa khush*):

<div dir="rtl">

ز کارهای موافق مخور فریب جهان

چو آن اصول که زن در جماع می آرد

</div>

> Do not believe the world's deception for a flatter's ploys;
> Since it's the very *usūl* that a woman brings to sex.

The term usūl while referring to a maqām with name also mean "principles" or "manner," but has connotations of "union" or "roots." Mukhlis also notes it's the name of a drum/rhythmic cycle that the people of Kashmir play in their gatherings and parties (Mukhlis 2013:48).

melodic invocation. Ghalib had been waiting all night in the gathering while other

poets recited, and it was nearly morning before he got a chance to present his own

verse. On account of it nearly being dawn, he says, "This is my *Bhairavī*!" before

presumably singing his ghazal. His allusion is to an Indian melodic contour or *rāg*

associated with early morning performances in Hindustani classical music (Hali 1897:

59-60). *Bhairavī*'s notes are the following:

> The *ārohā* or ascent:
> C, D♭, E♭, F, G, A♭, B♭
>
> The *āvarohā* or descent:
> C, B♭, A♭, G, F, E♭, D♭

Hali does not tell us what melody Ghalib actually sang or even the poem. Yet, this

particular *rāg* or Indian scale also conforms to the Phrygian color of *Husaini* and its

associated melodic contours implying that even Ghalib was actually singing in

"Davidian melodies" at this particular mushaʿirah. Additionally, in the contemporary

mushaʿirah setting, poets continue to use tonal contours with a *Husainī* or Phrygian-like

color. The examples that Regula Qureshi presents do not illustrate this parallel, as she

cites the more popular mid-20th-century style of the famous mushaʿirah poet Jigar

Moradabadi whose recitations were more "Dorian" or "Mixolydian" in color.[145]

For the 18th-century mushaʿirah, the parallels between musical structure,

poetic tropes, and, as we will discuss in the next section, affective context reveal a

larger set of social associations that specifically sung verse presented to the mushaʿirah

listener. In short, certain melodies used in sung poetry reference an Islamicate

aesthetic practice that would have been interpretable and recognizable to communities

that recite or sing poetry aloud. In fact, that musical tropes, melodic contours

themselves, and Persian music theory intersect in the mushaʿirah space is simply an

overlooked example of social processes and literary tropes overdetermining each other,

revealing the social life of literary aesthetics. Recitation could only be performed as

David's psalms in the mushaʿirah space where all art constantly aspires towards the

condition of lyricism.

Thus, compendium references to melody as best understood within a larger

network of musical and poetic terminology that reflect a popular understanding of how

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[145] One could easily chart the stylistic changes and genealogies in late 20th-century verse singing over about a sixty-year period. YouTube has become a vast archive of mushaʿirah clips as enthusiasts from India, Pakistan, the Middle East, and the United States upload digitized copies of VHS cassettes and film footage. The earliest footage and recordings of Jigar have been added to this trove as well. The next phase of my research aims to examine this growing archive in more depth.

verse and music are wedded in the mushaʿirah space. On one hand, period chroniclers were aware of the social expectations of sung verse and the preference ghazal singers had for the *dogāh maqām* as a "Davidian melody." Yet, there was also a literary existence for musical knowledge in the way poets familiar with musical terms would also technically illustrate the ghazal universe's "Davidian melodies" by naming them in Persian and Indian musical terminology. In short, the celebratory and excessive realms of the *majli,* and, in our case, the *mahfil-i mushāʿirah,* musical and literary knowledge are not mutually opposed. In spite of the limits of writing and tazkirah narrative conventions, mushaʿirah anecdotes in fact allow for aural moments to break through allowing us insights into how recited poetry could be perceived as a sensory phenomenon.

The Primordial Feast

While singing verses actualizes David's psalms in the mushaʿirah, Islamic notions of listening and music also hold the possibility to produce excessive and ecstatic states within the listener. That is, there is an appetitive element to hearing, given the Islamic associations between melody and intoxication. Even at the linguistic

351

level ears "eat" sound as seen in the Persian idiom *ba-gosh khordan*, to be eaten by the

ear. Song was associated with excessive religious rapture said to be equal to the

intoxication of alcohol, which was both utilized and condoned in some Sufi circles

(Karamustafa 1994). Additionally, in 17th-century writing elite masculine forms of

decorum were careful to explicate how a substance like music with a "potentially

destabilizing emotional power" need to be patronized as a mode of entertainment and

contained enchantment (O'Hanlon 1999; Brown 2006: 72). In the poetic realm, which

heavily relied upon Sufi religious ideas and a glut of wine imagery, hearing and

intoxication become a relatively standard trope to the point where even David's psalms

and his melodies' mystic abilities were associated with wine and romance. An

appropriate verse from Hafiz illustrates this idea:

<div dir="rtl">

بخواند راوی مستان به صوت داوودی

ز شوق او سخن چون زبور گشته ما

</div>

Sing, you storyteller of the drunkards, with a Davidian tone;
My desire for the Beloved turned my verses into David's psalms.

In the mushaʿirah space which materially conforms to lyric conventions, singing

poets were thought to posses talents equal to King David according to Indo-Persian

conceptions about musical expression and poetic excess. The mushaʿirah space was also

352

conducive to intoxication in that poets would often indulge in wine while at the gathering. The mushaʿirah impresario Latif Khan who was first mentioned in Dargah Quli Khan's 1739 travelogue, was often heard quoting the following verse in his raucous parties:

<div dir="rtl">
در حریم بزم مستان دور صبح و شام نیست
گردش جام است این جا گردش ایام نیست
</div>

> In the sanctuary of the drunkards' parties there is no cycle of day and night;
> It's the glass that circulates here, it's not the vicissitude of days.
> (Dargah Quli Khan 1993: 70)

We agree with Latif, passing the bottle is indeed as timeless image (and pastime), but in the ideology of late-Mughal *majlis* culture where social actors sought to preserve and revel in transient forms of expression, alcohol and verse would indeed be welcome if not mystic aspects in the mushaʿirah space.

Sung verse and imbibed wine has similar effects on the poets gathering for a mushaʿirah. In compiling his tazkirah, the Safavid era writer Muhammad Tahir Nasrabadi (1618-?) relied on reports from his father's friends on certain poets. In one instance, his father tells him that the poet Taʾib Karmani (c. early 1600s) was said to have hosted many gatherings in his home in Isfahan for his close friends (*yarān-i ahl*) including a local Qurʾan reciter named Hafiz Muhammad Tahir (c. early 1600s). Hafiz

Muhammad told Nasrabadi's father that at one of these gatherings the poet Taʾib asked

Hafiz Muhammad to sing one of his own quatrains that went:

<div dir="rtl">

یا رب به نیاز و ناز مستا الست

تایب را کن ز جام هشیاری مست

آن لحظه ببخشای که بر هم سائیم

ما پای به پای و دوستان دست به دست

</div>

> Oh Lord, with the coquetry of the drunkards of *alast*,
> Make Taʾib drunk in the goblet of realization.
> Give me that moment where we rubbed against each other,
> [When] we were toe to toe and the friends were hand in hand.

As soon as Hafiz Muhammad started singing the verses in the *dogāh maqām*, Taʾib let out

a cry and said, "Sing, for this is the last gathering. I bid you all farewell." The next day,

so Hafiz Muhammad tells us, the mushaʿirah attendees had heard that Taʾib died

(Nasrabadi 2000: 369).[146]

Taʾib's erotic verse of devotion alludes to the "feast of *alast*" so called according

to a verse in the Qurʾan where God says to creation, *"alastu bi-rabbikum"* (Am I not your

Lord)? To which primordial creation answered back, *"balā"* (yes)!" According to Persian

lyrical conventions the "feast of *alast*" is full of drinking and merriment because

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[146] Arzu also cites this but does not credit the anecdote to its sources in Tahir Nasrabadi's work. Arzu also copied a second rubaʿi from Tayib and, word-for-word, the entry of another Tayib from Tafresh who went to India and had a "mushaʿirah with M Allah Farkh Allah and died there" (Nasrabadi 2000:370; Arzu 2005: 298).

creation is still completely joined with God in nonexistence or ʿadam. Hafiz Muhammad

the Qurʾan reciter sang Taʾib's quatrain as David would a psalm, that is in the maqām

dogāh specifically, and it killed the writer, sending him to rejoin "feast of alast" with his

creator.

There are multiple trajectories of excessive interaction illustrated in the

anecdote and in the lines themselves. On one level, the mushaʿirah itself appears as a

platform for a type of recitation that allows listeners to revel in ecstatic experiences.

Given what we know about dogāh's intertextual potentialities as a "Davidian melody," its

multiple threads seem to converge in this lyric moment of musical and religious excess

in a mushaʿirah. Annemarie Schimmel outlines this in an exegesis of Rumi's ghazal

where he draws connections between the "feast of alast" and medieval idea of music of

the spheres (samāʿ-i samāwī) or the universal music.

مستمع الست شد پای دوان و مست شد
نیست بد او و هست شد لاله و بید و ضیمران

The listener of alast is dancing around and drunk.
It's not bad that all he had was the tulip, the willow, and the sweet basil.

Her point via Hafiz's verse is that much of the merriment in the "feast of *alast*" is aural. For our discussion, it seems the way in which tazkirahs writer cast certain mushaʿirah settings parallel certain conceptions of universal music and unification with God; that is, there is something of *alast* and its festivities, the drinking and singing most notably, within the mushaʿirah space.

In the above example, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir singing Taʾib's lines creates a moment of profound embodiment where the lines enact their message upon the listener. When Taʾib heard the lines voiced back to him the moment became too much to bear and he had to reunite with God the next day. In a very strange way, this anecdote allows for the ghazal universe to pierce through reality and the moment of *alastu bi-rabbikum* takes on a relational importance in the recitational space. The Davidian melody sung in *dogāh* is the aural and ecstatic force that sent Taʾib to the grave. He heard the "feast of *alast*" calling to him in the Qurʾan reciter Hafiz Muhammad's song. There is little written about this particular Qurʾan reciter except that he appeared to have been a family friend in Tahir Nasrabadi's circle in Isfahan. He had literary predilections, a good voice, musical training, and, judging by his name,

memorized the Qurʾan—all qualities that fit Islamic values for vocal and literary excellence.

About a generation later, Muhammad ʿAli Hazin (d. 1766) had a similar experience of aural and erotic excess while growing in Iran. Hazin and his father had returned to Isfahan after a sojourn in their native home of Lahijan. Hazin's father regularly hosted mushaʿirah gatherings at his home during their previous time in the city and the now it was the teenage Hazin's chance to have his own gathering. He quickly immersed himself in the social life of the Safavid center in the course of his studies. Naturally, he fell in love with an un-named local beauty. Hazin was so affected by his love for this person that "the guards in the ramparts of his mind suddenly becoming terrified" (*zawiah-nashīanān-i kākh-i dimāgh rā tarfah shorī dar uftād*) and "the heart's frantic nightingale took to singing [one of Hafiz's] melodies in a loud

357

warble"(ʿandalīb-i dil-i shorīdah-ḥāl bah gulbāng-i buland īn pardah sarāʾīdan garift)

(Muhammad ʿAli Hazin 1997: 137).[147]

During this affair, Hazin tells us he went out with his friends one night into one of Isfahan's gardens where they were exchanging poems. A famous calligrapher named Moulana ʿAli Kosari also happened to join them in this impromptu garden mushaʿirah. Hazin is careful to tell us that aside from being a "rarity of the age," ʿAli Kosari's talents in music and singing (ḥusn-i sūt wa sarāʾīān) produced "melodies that were a second Davidian miracle" (naghmah-ish sānī muʿjizah-yi dāwūdī). At his turn to recite in the mushaʿirah, ʿAli began singing the following verse that sent the teenage Hazin into out-of-body raptures for which there was no description (taqrīrī nīst):

امشب بیا تا در چمن سازیم پر پیمانه را
تو شمع و گل را داغ کن من بلبل و پروانه را

Tonight, come by so that in the garden to that I can fill your cup.

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[147] The verse seems particularly appropriate for Hazin's schooldays given verse's instructional imagery:

فاش می‌گویم و از گفتهٔ خود دلشادم
بندهٔ عشقم و از هر دو جهان آزادم
نیست بر لوح دلم جز الف قامت یار
چه کنم حرف دگر یاد نداد استادم

I would say it openly, and by content in having said it:
I am a love's slave yet I am free from the heaven and earth.
There is nothing on the tablet of my heart—just an alif like the Beloved's figure.
What'll I do? My master taught me no other letter!

You burn the candle and the rose, and I the nightingale and the moth.

It was no wonder Hazin was sent into a fit of teenage erotic ecstasy, he would have sung the lines to his object of fancy himself. This teenage mushaʿirah materializes the ghazal world as well: the young students were sitting in the rose garden at night with candles lit and there were probably insects flying in the air around them. That ʿAli Kosari recited lines so appropriate for the setting was indeed a Davidian miracle. There is no better anecdote in tazkirah descriptions of mushaʿirahs that bring the lyrical tradition of Persian ghazals into the social milieu of the 1700s. Like Taʾib's final gathering where Hafiz Muhammad recited a quatrain in a "Davidian melody," the narrative, the poetry, and the context of Hazin's garden romp serve multiple poetic, musical, and linguistic trajectories, but hinge on one descriptive goal: showing how the recitational context allows for sensory excess particular to gatherings at the time (Brookshaw 2010).

Meanwhile, in India, an account from 1751-52 chronicles that a poet named Mutawasil Khan Qabul (c. late 1600s) was in a partcular noble's garden holding a mushaʿirah with friends and "in a world of intoxication" (*dar ʿālam-i mastī*) when he slipped and fell. When he got up, his friends, making fun of him, said, "Oh, liquor. Oh, liquor (*yā sharāb yā sharāb*)." The poet extemporaneously responded with these lines:

بس که عمری کرد با هم دستگیری ها شراب
گر بلغزد پائی من از جا بگویم یا شراب

Even though it has held my hand for a lifetime, behold *sharāb*
If my foot slips even then I shall say, "oh *sharāb*"!
(Afzal Beg Khan Qaqshal 1921: 87)

The links between Islamic listening and devotion have been well documented

and discussed in scholarship on *samāʿ* and the Sufi orders that promoted musical

religiosity (Schimmel 1975b; Karamustafa 1994). What we can take from these

discussions is that there was a widespread socially acknowledged discourse about music

and sound in which its perception could create excessive states in listeners. In short,

listening had sensual qualities; it was appetitive. Listeners in the mushaʿirah setting

hearing a verse song were eaters of melody. In a ghazal cited by Annemarie Schimmel to

illustrate the aural and appetative qualities of the "feast of *alast*," Rumi in his *dīwān*

writes:

خوی شده‌ست گوش را گوش ترانه نوش را
کو شنود سماع خوش هم ز زمین هم آسمان

It's become a habit of the ear to be like the ear of the melody eater,
Whoever hears sweet music becomes the same as the earth and the sky.

From Nizami's *Khusrow-o Shīrīn* in his quintet, the image of pouring wine into the glass,

raising it the lips, and drinking, is fixed opposite the singer playing a guitar and

pouring melodies into the Lover's ear.

لبالب کرده ساقی جام چون نوش
پیاپی کرده مطرب نغمه در گوش

The barmaid filled the cup to the brim as if to drink,
The singer continually played melodies into my ear.

It was as if the ear was a mouth that could never be closed, always ingesting the

aural excess around it. As mentioned above, the ear is often construed with ingesting

verbs in certain Persian constructions; when telling us about a particular verse he had

heard, the tazkirah writer Bindraban Das Khush writes that "this poem was ingested by

the ear" (*īn shiʿr ba-gosh khordah*) (Khushgu 1959:89) or one can say "*andar gosh giriftan*"

or "to take into the ear." Sound is something ingested by the ear, the comprehension of

aural, sung poetry is something digestible, but, as we've also seen, it can often lead to

excessive states.

Recited and sung verse's ability to create excessive states in its listeners matches

well with the literal and actual effects of intoxication. Tazkirah writers were tuned into

the sensual aspects of the mushaʿirah and for good reason: the perception of poetry

361

itself was woven into the verse's tropic structures. Song melodies are dangerously

Davidian, the scent of coffee smells like a Lover's burning organs, and poets take on the

role as drunk prophets on the page and in the gathering. Mushaʿirah participants cast

the stimulating effects of song and the sonorous qualities of intoxicants as living

examples of lyric poetry's earthly existence. Lyricism relies on a universe of images and

ideas illustrating the conditions of alterity separating the Lover and the Beloved. Yet, in

the Mughal public sphere the mushaʿirah allows for these conditions to materialize in

the course of enjoying verse. So far we have looked at the song and wine in our

understanding of 18th-century Mughal sensual spheres. Now we turn to the objects of

poetic and actual desire in the mushaʿirah space: living, singing, and available beloveds.

4.3 Professional Beloveds and Song

While being away from home and his collection of mistresses and wives, our

travelogue writer Dargah Quli Khan clearly enjoyed all the delights Delhi's nightlife had

to offer. I am not saying the Mughal courtier engaged in sex tourism per se while in the

capital at his patron's behest, I am simply expounding on Katherine Butler Schofield's

point that though this is one of the few contemporary depictions of 1700s social life, we

should keep in mind that Quli Khan was coming as an outsider and his narration should

be read with some skepticism (Brown 2003, 2006). His perspective is not complete and

slanted towards a slightly dismissive yet fascinated take on Mughal social life in the

mid-18th century "relevant only to a specific subculture of the city as a single historical

moment, with which he was personally intimate" (Brown 2006: 82). As we know, he

visited gatherings with women and young dancing boys, noting how seductive they

were while casting them as any poet would the Beloved himself in a period verse. He

also captures a unique moment when the former singers of Jahandar Shah's brief court

(r. 1712-13) had fallen from respectability to be ridiculed as has-been catamites, in the

case of Shujaᶜat Khan (ibid.: 63; Dargah Quli Khan 1999: 95), or to be cast as popular

singers with no significant patrons, as was the case of Niᶜmat Khan Sadarang (1999: 90).

In the context of the mushaᶜirah's aural sphere, popular singers and singing

poets had overlapping aesthetic interests and occasional rumored romantic

entanglements. *Qawwāl*s, the popular shrine and court singers of Mughal India, traced

their origins back to Amir Khusrao who was a *qawwāl* of sorts himself, composing

devotional songs to his beloved teacher Nizam al-Din Auliya (d. 1325). For tazkirah

writers in the Persian and Urdu literary spheres of Mughal India, *qawwāls* were

363

important sources for popular verse circulated at shrines and Sufi gatherings devoted

to modes of ecstatic listening or *sama*ʿ. The poet and Sufi thinker Mir Dard was one of

the most famous examples of poets from this time period promoting his own take on

Sufi mystical thought advertised through musical performance and verse recitation.

Through a careful reading of period works we see that in fact *qawwāls* were at times

regular fixtures in poetry gatherings, in addition to being poetic and erotic objects.

In the mid-1700s, with Bedil's ʿurs underway and the transitional inheritors of

the Persian *tāzah-goʾī* movement staking their own literary claims, the nexus of the

semi-elite's musical and literary interests proves a productive starting point for our

investigation of the mushaʿirah's literary sensorium. In this regard, poets were very

interested in *qawwāls* poetic abilities to circulate verse. For instance, Ibrahim ʿAli Khalil

misquotes a passage from Ghulam ʿAli Azad's *Sarv-i Āzād* that casts *qawwāls* as

cosmopolitan social actors who circulate literary knowledge.

> In the tazkirah *Sarv-i Āzād* it is noted that, 'The people of Baghadad know both
> Arabic and Persian so the Sufis there in listening gatherings recite the words of
> Ibn al-Fardh the Egyptian in Arabic and in Persian the *masnawī* of Nasir
> ʿAli.' (Ibrahim Khan Khalil 1978)

In a curious way, Khalil has Azad sketching a literary map that links the eastern and western lands of the greater Persian cosmopolis through poetry recitation in terms with which he was more familiar.

Though I have not been able to trace this quote in any of the editions of Azad's *Sarv* that I have access to, Khalil's statement it worth examining from a cultural standpoint. It's unlikely that there would be *qawwāls* in Baghdad during this time, for being a *qawwāl* is a markedly Indian profession, and Nasir ʿAli's fame was largely confined to Iran, India, and Central Asia. Ibn al-Fardh, whom we discuss briefly in the next chapter as another paragon of graveside recitation, was known throughout the Muslim world for his mystic verse in Arabic (Homerin 1994).

However, it is intriguing that the tazkirah authors create a picture of *qawwāl*-like figures circulating the Indian poet Nasir ʿAli's verse far beyond the "national" borders of Indo-Persian or "*Sabk-i Hindī*" lands. It is as if Khalil was casting his version of the literary cosmopolis in the widest possible terms where Ibn-al Fardh and Nasir ʿAli's sung verse was the nodal connection in Baghdad linking the Arabic and Persian spheres. Form his point of view in India, which was still the center of Persian literary production, it seemed logical that a place like Baghdad would know Indian poets' verse

through recitation which tells us something about how period writers saw *qawwāls* as carriers of literary knowledge. Like the mushaʿirah, devotional singing has the ability to redeploy verse according to the playful logic of ambiguous delight endemic to Persian and Urdu literatures. Tazkirah writers plainly saw the devotional singers as members of the South Asian Muslim literary sphere even if they were a few rungs down the Mughal pecking order. Yet, it's the *qawwāls*' hold on verse that occasionally fascinated writers and the poets they document.

For instance in *Kalimat-i Shuʿarā* (c. 1693), Muhammad Afzal Sarkhush (d. 1715) a poet named Khalis (c 1670s?) came to India during the reign of Aurangzeb from Iran and composed poetry in the style of the classical age. Sarkhush tells us that *qawwals* (pl. *qawwālān*) have fixed his famous lines into melodies, but he knew that they were actually from some classical poets. "But no matter how many forms I took, the path did not take me to his lane; / Thus I only became the call of the nightingale, the scent of the rose, the wind in spring." The lines clearly echo a certain Sufi ecumenicalism that probably made them popular as they harmonized with gnostic ideas of belonging and oneness. Curiously, Sarkhush does not tell us which classical poet might have composed them (Muhammad Afzal Sarkhush 2010: 79; see Appendix N).

366

Sarkhush's disciple, Khushgu picked up the entry also noting that people recite

the verse under the name "Sayyid Husain Khalis," thinking was by the same Sayyid

Husain Khalis that Arzu mentions in his *Majmaʿ al-Nafāʾis* (Khushgu 2012: 82; Arzu 2004:

411). Arzu writes that Khalis came from Iran to India during the reign of ʿAlamgir

Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) and after marrying the daughter of Mughal bureaucrat and

earning some money decided to return to Iran. Arzu tells us that along the way Khalis

was killed by some greedy and covetous *zamindars* or land grant holders along the

border of Iran and India. While Arzu has some praise for Khalis' longer works, he does

not include the verse in any of Sayyid Husain Khalis' specimens.

Walih Daghistani and Tahir Nasrabadi tell a different story. Nasrabadi notes that

the verse belongs to a poet named Najib Astarbadi who came to Isfahan around 1675

and began the first part of his studies for Shiʿi jurisprudence (*parah-yi muqaddamat*

khwāndah) (2000: 465-6). He gives us no other details other than to say the lines are

from him. Walih appears to simply copy this entry, stating that he was a student who

came to Isfahan during the reign of Shah Suleiman (r. 1666-1694). It's most likely that

neither Walih and Tahir nor Sarkhush and Khush were correct. Both Najib and Khalis

could have been taking credit for popular and beautiful lines that someone else

367

composed and whose name was lost in the course the lines' continual retelling. As the verses circulated from Iran to Indian on speakers' tongues and on the lips of *qawwāls* the quatrains took on new owners depending on their context. Sarkhush's hunch that they were really the lines of an ancient composer furthers this argument in that the lines impart a lyrical feeling or affect that would have been enjoyable to listeners across social lines and in different contexts.

In Urdu tazkirahs, it was Mir Hasan who was also tuned into the verse that had become popular with *qawwāls*, citing the verse of Hatim as particularly popular in this context (Hasan 1940: 98). Unfortunately he does not tell us which of Hatim's lines were popular with the devotional singers. Yet, in the case of Amjad, one of Mir Hasan's "classical" or "old" poets,[148] he does tell us which lines *qawwāls* would circulate: "This is what I last heard in the idol house and Kaʿbah / Oh Amjad, I saw what was inside mankind" (Hasan 1940: 5; see Appendix N). The poet Hasan ʿAli Shauq was a professional soldier of Afghani decent who worked in the army of ʿImad al-Mulk Ghazi al-Din Khan (d. 1800), another mid-18th-century king maker responsible for several blindings and assassinations. Like Amjad's couplet, Shauq's quatrain, according to

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[148] For the uninitiated reader, Mir Hasan groups his subjects by pen name name then divides them further by epoch: ancient, medieval, and modern. These are relative terms since his scope cover only an eighty year period.

Hasan, on account of being "recited in every corner of India, was quite famous" (ibid.: 94; see Appendix N).

Like the sung Persian lines that Walih and Sarkhush ascribe to different poets in different times, Shauq and Amjad's sung verses are suggestive of a form of ecumenical populism found in Indian Islam or Sufism's urban setting. These ideas were part of a public sentiment that would have been easily discernible in the sensory and playful logic of the mushaʿirah setting as well. They capitalize on lyrical tropes in which the Beloved competes with God for the Lover's attention. In actuality, there is no competition because the Lover would rather worship the Beloved as living idol with a stony heart.

The *qawwāls* and their ability to circulate verse helps reveals the means by which certain lines became emblematic for a wide range of Indo-Persian public sentiments. A public "affectual" mode of communication was present in the mushaʿirah setting and in the tazkirahs that sought to chronicle this aspect of Mughal public society. As discussed by Sunil Sharma, there was a strategic deployment of verse and song in late-Mughal society which influenced public literary ideas (2009). A famous verse said to belong to

Amir Khusrao dances between homoerotic imagery and transcendental religious

experience, illustrating this tendency according to Sharma. The famous verse:

هر قوم راست راهی دینی و قبله گاهی
ما قبله راست کردیم بر سمت کج کلاهی

For every community there is a way, a religion, and a place to pray.
I have righted my prayer direction towards the one with the crooked cap

These famous lines recount a history all their own as "defining aspects of Mughal oral

culture" joining the dichotomies of the religious and profane, the spoken and written,

and the past and present (Sharma 2009: 20). The oral popularity of the verse's salient

meaningfulness is in part attested to their presence in tazkirah histories beginning in

the 17th century with the *Jahāngīrnāmah*, the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, the *Maʿasr-i Jahaāngīrī*,

and lastly retold in Walih Daghistani's tazkirah *Riyāz al-Shuʿarā* in the early 18th

century. I rely on the final text.

The story follows a familiar Sufi trope of ecstasy where the Emperor Jahangir

asks his courtiers to explain the above line which had been recited in a courtly Sufi

listening session by some local *qawwāls*. In Walih Daghistani's telling the poet Moulana

ʿAli Ahmad Khalifah Nishani (d. April 11, 1610) approached the throne in an ecstatic

state, dancing and throwing up his arms while explaining the line (Walih 2010: 2223).

According to Walih, ʿAli Ahmad says:

> Once during the days of the Hindus' festivities a congregation of men and women totally decked out in their finery amassed along the edge of the Yamuna river for the purpose of bathing. Having just come from his hermitage, Sheikh Nizam al-Din Aulia was entertained by the assembly and this line came to his blessed tongue: "For every community there is a way, a religion, and a place to pray." At that moment the Sheikh's hat was tilted on his blessed head when one of his students, Amir Khusrao, who happened to be there, responded with this line: "I have righted my prayer direction towards the one with the crooked cap." (Ibid.)

Moulana ʿAli Ahmad then brought his hand to his head and tilted his cap awry so Jahangir could see how it was done. As soon has he tilted the hat, "his life left him and his corpse fell to the ground." The other courtiers gathered around his head thinking he had just fainted, but it turned out ʿAli Ahmad had died. Jahangir came down from the throne and took ʿAli Ahmad's head into his lap saying, "What ever was thought to be possible, its outcome is not predestined." They then bore out ʿAli Ahmad's body and interred it with "thousands of cries and wails."

The story follows a familiar trope in Sufi hagiographies where a poetic line sung to a tuneful melody knocks its listener unconscious or dead in a moment of transcendence and spiritual communion—something we saw in the previous section

371

when mushaʿirah reciters would invoke the feast of *alast* to then die the next day.

Though the line is intriguing in and of itself, the line's folkloric history explodes the

verse's affectual potential when it enters speakers' mouths. On one hand it is a moment

of intimacy and playfulness between master and disciple, and on the other the line

embodies a unique "everpresentness" with its power to send its speakers into ecstatic

and erotic deaths.

Devotion to Erotic Voices

In regard to our discussion of singing linked with certain appetitive ideas in

1700s India, I want to focus on the erotic aspect of the *har qaum* lines as they reinforce

ideas about singing's erotic potential within the mushaʿirah and *qawwāls* themselves as

potential erotic partners. If we remember at the end of Chapter One, there was an

anecdote about Saʾib insulting a young boy who was the "plaything of dirty old men."

The narrator brings up the concept of the ʿillat-i mashāʾikh or the Sufi sheikhs' disease

referencing the widely held understanding on erotic tensions between the Sufi master

and his young male disciple. The term also references certain Sufi sensibilities since

Sufi elders are often referred to as *mashāʾikh* in general and Nizam al-Din Auliya to

372

whom to poem's second line was supposedly addressed is known as the *sultān-i mashāʾikh.* If we remember Bedil's song, he overtly construes the lyric images of spring with what are clearly homoerotic references. I do not wish to foreclose other interpretations of Khusrao's legendary lines, but with Bedil's song showing how *kulāh* can refer to the Beloved's member, we can see how certain aspects of public verse materializes lyrical eroticism for its listeners in both the poetry and in the form of the professional singers and beloveds that would also join in the mushaʿirah setting.[149]

Specifcally, the *har qaum rāst rāhī* lines and Bedil's song could be what Mir Taqi Mir terms *zabān-i lūtīyān* or the catamites' tongue to reference flirtatious and humorous speech which appears to be acceptable in some settings. To return to the Mughal comedian Lazzat as cited in Khushgu's *Safīnah*, the next thing he lists after the "delight" of hearing the call to prayer daily is seeing "a spectacle of 'distractions' in the bathhouse" (Khushgu 2010: 609). The verse's hold within in them a nascent commentary on public eroticism which can be used to insult people in some instance, as well shall see below this is Mir's first intention, or it can reference public flirtation.

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[149] Kalpkli and Andrews' work *The Age of Beloveds* develops this idea and I rely on their summations to frame some of what I attempt in this project (Andrews 2004).

It's unclear exactly what Mir means with this concept but it seems to allude to flirtatious and clearly homoerotic verse that had humorous multivalent properties within the context of certain publicly circulated poetry. "Catamites' speech" could be used to bring erotic objects closer to the speaker through poetic and flirtatious interactions or it could simply be an insult commentating on someone who does uphold Mughal conventions on proper masculine social control. As I argued in Chapter Three, decorum needed to be upheld in the mushaʿirah setting but not at the expense of delight. So too the presence of Bedil's song and Mir's *zabān-i lūtīyān* shows that in some settings of the mushaʿirah and the bazaar certain verses could appear as ambiguous come-ons that referenced their own recitation while also offering a possibility for something more. In literary depictions of Bedil he maintains his distance from Zatalli's "inappropriate" bawdy verse, but Khushgu did not hesitate to record Bedil's song with highly sexualized lyric imagery. In particular, I read the famous Sufi lines on the crooked cap a referencing the social acceptability of the "catamites' tongue" in the mushaʿirah setting where participants passed around jokes and propositioned the professional singers who could also a become professional beloved at a moment's notice.

374

While visiting Allahabad in the late 1700s Saʿdat Yar Khan Rangin (1756-1827),

Ghulam ʿAli Mus'hafi (d. 1824), and Muhammad Aman Nisar (c. 1760s), took a

pilgrimage to a local *dargāh* or shrine on a Thursday, the traditional day for visiting

saints' shrines known as *jumaʿ rāt* or the eve of Friday. A young boy was dancing in the

courtyard of the mausoleum, inspiring Mus'hafi to recite these lines:

گل کھا موۓ تھے جن کے لئے جسم زار پر
دو پھول بھی نہ لائے کبھی وہ مزار پر

> The person who I had died for while branding this groaning body-
> would never even bring two flowers to put on [my] grave.

Mus'hafi seems to be commenting on the attractive boy dancing in the tomb compound

and the roses strewn upon the saint's tomb. People often eat the flowers scattered on

the grave as a form of *tabarruk* or communion to receive a saint's blessings.

Additionally, *gul khānā* or eat a rose means to be branded as an act of love. In kind, Nisar

responds with this ghazal:

تم رات کو بھی نہ آئے نہ اپنے قرار پر
یہ ظلم تم بے کیا کیا اس بے قرار پر

> You didn't even come at the settled time last night.
> What is this tyranny you've done on this unsettled one?

Matching the rhyme from his two companions' compositions, Rangin is not to be

outdone and answers back with these two ghazals:

بہم جوں چکور غش ہیں اجی ایک یار پر
بلبل کی طرح جی نہیں دیتے ہزار پر

پا بوس یار کی ہمیں حسرت ہے اے نسیم
آستہ آئیو تو ہمارے مزار پر

> Oh, I've gone crazy as a loon for that guy.
> But he's like a nightingale and won't take to a dirty bird.
>
> Oh morning breeze, I desire to kiss the Beloved's feet.
> Blow slowly, then, over my gravestone.

Like Mus'hafi, Rangin appears also to be commenting on the context when these three poets engage in a spontaneous recitational gathering. The first ghazal develops three bird themes and contains a double entendre or *īhām.* Though it has been translated as loon in the above rendering, the *chakūr* or partridge is a clumsy flightless bird that lusts after a radiant and unattainable moon. Rangin sees the dancing boy and turns the ghazal imagery around through the poem's female speaker, making the Beloved into a sweet-voiced bird usually, a symbol usually reserved for the Lover. In the second line the double entendre occurs with the word *hazār* which can refer to two things in this context. On one hand, the nightingale can also be called *hazār-dāstān* or the bird of one thousand tales. On the other hand, *hazār* can refer to a prostitute or *hazār gaidah* (one deflowered a thousand times) or *hazār mekhī* (one pierced a thousand

376

times). It seems this second character would have just as many tales as the nightingale. Rangin's recitation also alludes to the graveside context where Mus'hafi, Nizar and he were enjoying themselves. The second ghazal's speaker ask the wind to blow slowly so the Beloved will lazily meander over the grave where the Lover lies dead, but still hoping to meet the Beloved.

The anecdote appears in Rangin's tazkirah, *Majālis-i Rangin*, a title that plays on his name and thus could be called "*The Delightful Conferences*" or "*Rangin's Gatherings*." This is striking collection of anecdotal mushaʿirah information that Rangin probably recorded in his diary over a period of a decade or so as he moved between cities and met with fellow poets in different settings, sharing poems on boats, at river *ghāts*, and in people's homes. For our discussion, Rangin's pilgrimage with Mus'hafi and Nisar highlights the shrine space as conducive for not only a mushaʿirah but also as a space for bandying around multivalent and contextually enlivening verses in what Mir what might have called the "catamites' tongue." Through the poems and Rangin's narrative, an image of poetic interchange appears in which the speakers show no compunctions about blending the reverential with the erotic. It also conforms to the paradigm outlined in the *har qaum rast rahi...* lines in a situation that is remarkably similar but

rather than seeing Hindus bathing in the Yamuna, the three poets see a beautiful

dancing boy in shrine strewn with rose petals urging them to utter similarly erotic and

ecstatic verses.

Much of our historical picture of public sexuality and eroticism in Mughal India

has been framed around the image of the courtesan. Public women like courtesans and

dancers were patronized objects of public sexuality in Mughal culture and it was

acceptable to announce this in verse, as seen in ours examples of "catamites' speech

above. In 1652 the writer Muhammad Afzal Sarkhush (d. 1715) was 11 years old and

living in the *qasbah* town of Kairana in present day Shamli District. He fell in love with a

beautiful female ropedancer at a country fair, and he wrote a quatrain that created such

an uproar, it could be "heard up and down the Doab."

<div dir="rtl">

آن دلبر بوالعجب که ماه زیباست

بالای علم چو گل به شاخ رعناست

نی نی غلطم که آفتاب محشر

یک نیزه بر آمد و قیامت برپاست

</div>

That heart-stealing acrobat who's as pretty as the moon
Has the grace of a hoisted flag like a rose upon the vine.
No, no, I'm mistaken! It's the sun on the Day of Judgment.
A single spear appeared and the apocalypse is now afoot.
(Sarkhush 2012: 182)

378

Sarkhush writes that after the poem became so popular Kairana's local literati came and warned his father, "That's quite a boy, you have there. Don't let him catch you off your guard!" The term *mahshar* usually refers to the Day of Judgment, but literary means "gathering" with connotations of a public mass. Sarkhush was standing in a country fair of sorts watching a beautiful ropedancer above the heads of his fellow spectators crowded around the performer. Her beauty was rose-like, but a more apt description came to mind: this fair was the Day of Judgment and the performer's beauty was an apocalypse. Sarkhush was tapping into an affective aspect of literary perception endemic to the Mughal public sphere. His poem shows there is a concept of a public within the bound system of Indo-Persian literature in which its erotic script allows for public recitations that doubled as declarations of love for professional beloveds. Sarkhsuh's poem is beautiful in the tazkirah (that is, it is *bayāzī* to use Wali and ʿUrfi's term) because it gives the reader a sense of its publicness in they was it became very popular and in its use of the term *mahshar* to reference the crowd at the country fair.

In order to better frame the possibility of catamite's speech as an ambiguous form of sexual suggestion in the mushaʿirah, it helps to examine anecdotes where flirtation and outright bawdy propositions were to be expected. Namely, the instances

appear when tazkirah writers bring us into the courtesan's quarters where one might expect to find poetry and song—and sex. The courtesan's salon becomes a third space to frame catamite speech with the idea that public mushaʿirah. Poetry can indeed be ambiguously flirtatious.

The courtesan's chambers are only sparsely mentioned but their instances reveal a certain erotic dynamism. In the last chapter, I examined Azad Bilgrami's visit to the home of some courtesans for poetry recitation. Even though they had a " jolly gathering lasted until late in the night," we know nothing about what the courtesans were actually doing during their festivities (Ghulam ʿAli Azad Bilgrami 1913: 208). However, it does show that the courtesan's chambers were a constituent, semi-public for Mughal-era poetry recitation. In Azad Bilgrami's narration, the courtesans seem to be background characters to men's recitation. However, we know from previous anecdotes and verses that women were in fact writing and reciting poetry during this time period (ʿAbd al-Haʾi Safa 1891; Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi 1933, 1985a; Schofield 2012; see Appendices I and R). The courtesan's salon was a regular meeting space but for Azad Bilgrami the unnamed courtesans' home was only important in the context of his final meeting with his friend Jaʿfar Ruhi.

Mughal public society was a male space where any female public presence connoted sexual availability, a role that scripted and marked courtesans as professional beloveds.[150] The presence of courtesans in the mushaʿirah or during an instance of formal poetry recitation in many ways constricts them as erotic objects for reciting participants. The Urdu poet Utakkarlais (c. 1750s?) was infamous among Delhi's writers for assembling nonsense verses in a porridge of languages that he would recite off-the-cuff in mushaʿirahs. He could never recall them to write down or recite again but Mir Hasan was with him one time watching a young woman dance at in courtesan's salon. When one attendee asked Utakkarlais to recite something for the occasion, Mir Hasan wrote down a verse that clearly shows how erotic bawdiness was part of the mushaʿirah experience.

کود رے کود اگر چھل کو بجھانا تجھے
بچی ہو بیٹھ ذکر پر جو چدانا تجھے

Go on jumping, but you have to allay all pretense.
You are the girl that having sat on a prick has to get fucked!

_____

[150] In fact, sexual relationships with women were understood as base compared to the spiritual refinement of an erotic relationship with a young man. In a discusssion on this issue, C.M. Naim quotes an Urdu verse:

Who ever dumps boys and wants whores,
He's no lover, he's just another lecher

جو لونڈا چھوڑ کر رنڈی کوں چاہے
وہ کوئی عاشق نہیں ہے بلھواس ہے

In the Persian language context, the "fresh-speaking" poet Nasir ʿAli too was said to

have improvised this couplet in praise of a dancing girl according to Khushgu:

<div dir="rtl">

هر آن که صورت شهوت فزائی تو بیند

ز راه دیده چو طاوس می کند انزال

</div>

Whoever sees your lust-inducing face,
Through the means of sight, like a peacock, would ejaculate. (1959:6)[151]

Khushgu tells another story where one of Nasir ʿAli's students, Muhmmad

ʿAshiq Himmat[152] (d. ~1750), fell in love with the Allahabad nawab's dancing girl named

Minu and made the mistake of reciting a panegyric where he noted his desire for her:

<div dir="rtl">

زهمت خان بهاردر آنقدر چشم طمع دارم

رساند دست کوتاهٔ مرا تا دامن منون

</div>

To the extent that I have a jealous eye for Himmat Khan Bahadur
My unworthy hand was brought to the hem of Minu's skirt. (ibid.: 31 and 84)

The Allahabad governor Himmat Khan Bahadur was not impressed with ʿAshiq's

sexually suggestive poem and said, "Establishing your object of praise as a cuckold was

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[151] I ask the reader to remember Chapter Three when Nasir ʿAli asked one of Gulshan's friends if he could bite a young boy's lips to only reply with an "apology" that blames the friend for bringing such a delectable object before him. We also have to remember in another gathering one of his friends turned around a Sufiistic verse on the hidden qualities of God into a way of calling Nasir a "cunt."

[152] ʿAshiq's parents died when he was young, and since they were Nasir ʿAli's neighbors, the poet himself raised ʿAshiq as his own. The young man became a natural lyricist imbibing Nasir's instruction in the poet's home. He also seemed to take on some of Nasir ʿAli's jovial nature.

382

not a friendly move" (*mamdūh rā qurramasāq qarār dādah lihāzā sohbat bar ār na-gardīd*).

ʿAshiq had to leave Allahabad and made his way to Gorakhpur in search of another patron.[153]

These verses show how courtesans and other professional beloveds were held as erotic objects of male attention and worthy of lyrical praise—or lyrical come-ons. They were a class of public performers whose sexuality was a commodity in a late Mughal public sphere where dancers, singers, and professional beloveds were perceived, pined after, patronized, and propositioned by the male urban elite. In these anecdotes, even though they appear as passive recipients of lyrical outburst, the dancer that Utakkarlais was reciting about must have heard the verse and probably had her own rejoinder in response to his bawdy lines, as did the dancer who listened to Nasir ʿAli's arcane commentary on sexuality and visual sensuality. Yet, there are instances in which courtesans were active participants in reciting verse. Mir Hasan, whom we know as a regular mushaʿirah attendee, visited with a courtesan named Khalah Begum who

---

[153] Khushgu also fell in love with a dancer once and asked Shah Gulshan to divine an answer in his dreams to see if the dancer would we be his. Sadly, she went with a zamīndār or landholder from Bikaner (Khushgu 167 and Pellò 16).

recited verses for him.[154] In Lucknow, Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi records courtesan's verses as well in his chronicles which we saw in Chapter Two above.

While the *qawwāls* were not professional beloveds in the way courtesans were, it seems they did hold an erotic station in artistic hierarchies of the time. For instance a *khamsah* by the poet ʿAbd al-Haʾi Taban (d. 1749), based on a verse by the Urdu poet Inʿam Allah Yaqin (1727-1755), makes an interesting reference to *qawwāls'* relationship to the Lover within the lyrical universe of ghazal poetry:

<div dir="rtl">

سنتا ہوں کہیں یارو جب راگ کی مجلس کو

تب گھر سے میں جاتا ہوں مشتاق نہایت ہو

قوالوں کی کر منت بے حال ہو اور رو رو

کہتا ہوں مری خاطر اس وقت یہی بولو

کیا کام کیا دل نے دیوانے کو کیا کہیے

</div>

When I hear, oh friends, a *rāg majlis* somewhere,
Then I go from my house quite eagerly.
The *qawwāls*, having obliged us, wail away listlessly.
I say for my sake tell me this this quickly:
What all did the heart do to this mad man? What can be said?
(Mir ʿAbd al-Haʾi Taban 2006: 331)

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[154]

<div dir="rtl">

کہا تھا ساربان کے کان میں لیلیٰ نے اہستہ

کہ مجنوں کی خرابی کا کہیں مذکور مت کیجو

</div>

Laila whispered low into the camel driver's ear
Please make no mention of Majnun's defamation

As detailed in the previous chapter, listening *majālis* were fairly common occurrences for an urban population in the 18th century and in this poem the Lover is simply attending one to console himself through an ecstatic spiritual experience but instead finds untalented, unenthusiastic *qawwāls* wailing their verses. This only makes the Lover feel worse. In the case of an anecdote about one poet named Pakbaz, going to a musical gathering for devotional singing would have undoubtedly rent his heart strings for he had fallen in lover with a *qawwāl.*

4.4 Affairs in the Mushaʿirah

In late 18th-century Delhi the poet Salah al-Din Pakbaz (c. 1740s) was a regular attendee in the mushaʿirah circuit, showing up at the famous Urdu poet Mir Taqi Mir's monthly gathering. Pakbaz also hosted his own gatherings in his home every Friday where many people would also come to listen to the city's *qawwāls* sing. The tazkirah writer and poet Qaʾim al-Din Qaim Chandpuri (1722-1793 or 94) attended his events, as did the poet and musician Qizilbash Khan Ummid who often heard Pakbaz recite. Of the several verses mid-century tazkirah record, Mir, Gardezi, and Qaʾim all record a poem

by Pakbaz that was making the rounds in Urdu literary circles at the time that

illustrates Mir's concept of catamite speech:

مجھے درد و الم رہتا ہے نت گھیرے میاں صاحب
خبر لیتے نہیں کیسے ہو تم میرے میاں صاحب

I'm in pain and misery that dear sir remains completely surrounded
You are my dear sir, why don't you inquire [in on me].

This strangely multivalent line could hint at a *Rekhti* voice where a female or male

Lover is asking a specifically male Beloved (*mīyān sāhib*) to stop ignoring him. But the

verse is ambivalent and could answer itself by reading it this way: "It seems to me [my]

dear sir sits constantly surrounded by pain and sorrow / Didn't you watch out? Now

how are you, my dear sir?"

Fittingly, Pakbaz also fell in love with on the of *qawwāls* that came to sing in his

majlis. Specifically it was a *qawwāl* named Makkhan who was part of a duo with another

singer named Sona. Mir Hasan, who was fond of such things, explicitly notes a rumor

that the two became lover and beloved (*ʿāshiq maʿshūq har do),* taking the same name

(Makkhan) so that it became like "falling in love with oneself." As evidence, Mir Hasan

cites a poem by Pakbaz in reference to the infamy of his affair:

386

بہیں ندیاں مرے آنسو سے جو میں بجر میں رویا
کہے ہے سارے بستی بائے مکھن نے ہمیں کھویا

Rivers flowed from my tear which I cried in separation.
All over the block it has been said 'Oh, Makkhan ruined me!' (1940: 150)

Mughal society was incredibly hierarchal at this time and professional singers were classified and ranked according the prestige of their musical genre. At times, this consigned them to a far lower social rank than the semi-elite poets discussed here. We should note that though poets sang their verse to psalm-like melodies for ecstatic effect, much of it was done with intimate friends in a private context. Many poets were accomplished musicians but they played for theirs and their friends' enjoyment and never for money as professional singers like *qawwāls* were expected to do.

Dargah Quli Khan did have a strange fixation on singers' sexual availability and the status of the court singers. It appears his trip to Delhi coincided with a time when Mughal high society was interested in propositioning some of these formerly high prestige singers. Curiously, he makes no mention of his colleague Ummid Qizilbash Khan whom he would have presumably known since they both shared a patron in Nizam al-Mulk and visited some of the same salons in Delhi between 1739 and 1741. Also, it appears Ummid had an abiding interest in professional singers as well, to the

387

point that he actually began an affair with another professional singer that Dargah Quli

Khan praised to the skies in spite of the said singer's recent loss of status and

patronage.

Qizilbash Khan Ummid

No figure can be more important to framing the link and contextualizing the

parallels between the mushaʿirah and Sufi *majālis* than the Iranian immigrant,

musician, and poet Muhammad Raza who was popularly known as Qizilbash Khan and

wrote under the pen name Ummid. Qizilbash Khan was born in Hamdan in 1668, a

district in Eastern Iran, and from there moved to Isfahan in his youth to further his

education. In this thriving Safavid cultural center, he learned poetry and was probably a

young regular among the city's coffeehouse rabble among whom the famous chronicler

Tahir Nasrabadi was practically an institution unto himself. When he was in his late

thirties, Ummid came to India in the last years of Aurangzeb ʿAlamgir's reign, which

ended in 1707, to seek out his maternal uncle, Asad Khan, a prime minister working for

the Mughal state. He didn't find his uncle, but instead he met his cousin, Zulfiqar Khan,

a *mīr bakhshī* or chief paymaster under Bahadur Shah I (r. 1707-1712) in Aurangabad.

It was through this connection that he received *mansab* or land grant of 1000 *zāt*

in Burhanpur to the north though he was never very satisfied with it. Nonetheless,

Ummid made the South his home from 1707 until 1737 or so, managing his land grant

for a time and then seeking literary patronage and social prestige in the city of

Hyderabad's court. He was very involved in the political intrigue of the time for the

southern viceroy for the Mughal crown, Nizam al-Mulk Asif Jah I (r. 1724-1748), nearly

executed Ummid in 1724 on account of his close association with the usurper Mubariz

Khan (d. 1724). Mubariz was beheaded and Ummid was sent to prison. Qizilbash Khan

Ummid eventually earned the merciful viceroy's trust, and remained a courtier under

Nizam al-Mulk's patronage for another fourteen years. In 1738 or so, the viceroy was

summoned to Delhi by the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah (r.1719-1748) in

preparation for Nadir Shah's immanent attack. Ummid, who had many literary

connections in Delhi, accompanied his patron as did another famous courtier, the

tazkirah writer and diarist, Dargah Quli Khan, upon whom we've been relying for many

anecdotes and descriptions of Delhi's social life.

When the fighting ended, Nadir Shah trucked back to Iran with Bahadur Shah's

peacock throne and Nizam al-Mulk returned to Hyderabad. Rather than returning with

his patron to the south, Qizilbash Khan spent his remaining years from 1738 until his death in 1746 taking part in Delhi's lively salon scene. It is over this nine-year period that clearest picture of Qizilbash Khan Ummid emerges as a Mughal socialite, a central character in Delhi's ubiquitous mid-century musha'irahs, and a nexus point between music and poetry.

All the tazkirah writers that chronicle Ummid's fixture in Delhi society over this decade note his attractive personality and wit. In the social milieu of the time, he was a paragon of appropriate, public masculine charisma with a humorous disposition. Additionally, Ummid had several students including the Urdu poet Ashraf 'Ali Fighan (d. 1772). He was also very close with the poet and secretary Anand Ram Mukhlis (1699-1750) who relied on Ummid for several citations and verse examples in his encyclopedic dictionary *Mir'at al-Istalah*. They had known each other for over thirty years from Mukhlis' travels to the South and often held gatherings together during Ummid's time in Delhi.

Importantly, Ummid was adept at singing melodies and would pronounce the lyrics according to the correct Indian accent, which few native Iranians could to according to Arzu's estimation (Siraj al-Din 'Ali Khan Arzu 2004: 1691). The early 19th-

century tazkirah writer ʿAshiqi paints a florid description of Qizilbash Khan's musical

talents:

> In understanding the laws of music and singing, he was such a flame-voiced
> (*shoʿlah-āwāz)*[155] singer that as a musician he could burn you head to toe with the
> flame of his voice (*shoʿlah-i āwāz*) and his *Davidian melodies* would make the
> nightingale in the garden look like mincemeat. The chirp of his intriguing
> whistling could double the innermost pleasures of the worthies of music and
> love, and this learned teacher would kick up the tumult of ecstasy amongst the
> residents [of any gathering]. (2012: 124)

Not only was Qizilbash Khan charming and witty, but his musical abilities fit within

popular notions about musical talent, love, and ecstasy as described in Persophone

lyrical terminology. Given the previous sections' discussion on the musical-poetic

aspects of 1700s public culture, we should not be surprised that the tazkirahs aim to

show that this was a poet with an innate talent for crafting "Davidian melodies."[156]

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[155] The term "*shoʿlah-āwāz*" was popular during this time period as cited by Mukhlis in his dictionary.
Fittingly, an example Mukhlis gives is a ghazal praising a young *qawwāl*:

Since they hold a mirror in wedding festivities,	چنان که آینه گیرند در چراغانی
It's apparent from his throat that he is flame-voiced.	عیان ز گردن او شعلههای آواز

[156] Ummid was no stranger to the chemical routes of sociability either. Husain Quli Khan ʿAshiqi writes
his *Nashtar-i ʿIshq* (c. 1817) that the poet was drinking with friends at home and reciting verses when a
pious sheikh dropped by. Qizilbash Khan was paying attention to his friends who were there and didn't
notice the religious man outside until he pulled back the curtain and saw him. Not missing a beat, Ummid
recites this verse (ʿAshiqi 2012):

Oh sheikh, come on in. There is a drinking party in here;	شیخ تشریف ببر بزم شراب است اینجا
Lest your coat tails get wet, we're all totally sloshed in here.	دامنت تر نشود عالم آب است اینجا

One of Qizilbash Khan Ummid's closest friends was the singer and

instrumentalist Niʿmat Khan Sadarang (d. 1746) whom we mentioned before in

connection with Delhi's poetry circles. Dargah Quli Khan heard Sadarang sing while he

was in Delhi and has this to say about the singer:

> Among the greatest of gifts is his presence in India. He has perfect skill (*yad-i tulah*) in the invention of melodies and the creation of variations and would be able to compete with the maestros of old. He is the inventor of colorful *khāyal* compositions and can compose in several languages. Actually, he is the leader of Delhi's community of singers and due to his personal zeal he bows to no one except the emperor. In the era of Jahandar Shah (r. 1712-1713) he had the all the respect and riches. He is often present at the death anniversary gatherings (ʿurs) of the Sufi masters which he himself organizes and puts on. The nobles and the leaders of the city crowd together at his house on the 11th of every month to such a great degree that a seat together cannot be had. So, people start [arriving] in the morning and end up hanging out together until lights of the next morning come [when the performances end]. The *rāg*-concert ends with [the melodies from] *bibhās*

<div dir="rtl">

مطرب این بزم از بس راه دلها می زند

دست بر طنبور و ناخن بر دل ما می زند

</div>

> In so much as the singers of this gathering steal hearts
> His hand strikes the *tanbūr* and his nail scratches my heart
> (Dargah Quli Khan 1993: 90)

If we remember, Niʿmat was also connected with the "Amir Khusrao" of the age,

Saʿd Allah Gulshan, hosting a monthly musical death anniversary celebration at the

grave of the poet-musician. Dargah Quli Khan vaguely alludes to this in the above

description. On the professional front, Niᶜmat Khan Sadarang began singing the *khayāl* style developed by the *qawwāl* ateliers after his fall from favor at the bloody end of Jahandar Shah's reign—Dargah Quli Khan makes a direct reference to this.

Sadarang was one of the most important musical figures in 18th-century Mughal India. His credentials were impeccable in the musical realm as he had received training from in the prestigious *dhrupad* style of singing favored in the Mughal courts since Jalal al-Din Akbar (r. 1556-1605) first patronized its originator Tansen. Also, Sadarang had learned the popular style of song performed by *qawwāl*s which had not only expanded his palette as a performer, but also connected him to the ubiquitous Sufi devotional singing set in shrines (Brown 2010). After first being patronized by one of Aurganzeb's sons, Sadarang became wrapped up the court intrigue of Jahandar Shah's brief reign. The emperor raised a dancing girl to the level of a queen and began handing our wealth and titles to courtesans and singers, including Sadarang, usually reserved for the royal elite of Mughal society. This reversal of Mughal hierarchies and social order served as perfect pretext for the throne's other competitors and the infamous the Sayyid Brothers of Jansath to unseat Jahandar Shah and have him strangled. What followed

meant a loss of prestige for Sadarang as the Sayyid Brothers and their puppet emperor restored the old order.

Following Katherine Butler Schofield's interpretation, *khayāl* became Sadarang's ticket to new patronage and prestige in an act of artistic and political reinvention. He did not invent *khayāl* as popularly believed thought. Instead, he blended elements of his musical training and social connections to help him earn new patronage under Muhammad Shah's court (1719-1748) and popularize a musical style that had once been the domain of the Sufi singers (ibid.). Unlike his portrayal of the singer Shujaʿat Khan, Dargah Quli Khan clearly respects Sadarang as a perfomer of artistic merit even though he does make a slightly disparaging comment on Sadarang's loss of prestige. During those years, Sadarang may have been "self-employed" after falling from favor after the Sayyid Brothers' machinations in the restoration of Mughal social and artistic order in 1713. His self-financed concerts and extensive shrine performances would have been thought beneath a courtly singer and we may be seeing Sadarang in the midst of his transitionary years before he would become a highly respected proponent of *khayāl* in the court of Muhammad Shah (r. 1719-1748). Yet, social relations were changing during this time period which was in the midst of profound linguistic and cultural

vernacularization. Perhaps Sadarang's performances in the shrines there were not a mark of a loss in status, but a product of the times leaning toward more vernacular forms of expressive culture on the linguistic and musical fronts. The poet singer Ummid was certainly a product of this as seen in his engagement in Urdu poetry writing and his correct knowledge of Hindustani music. Intriguingly, Dargah Quli Khan's citation of the verse at the end of Niᶜmat Khan's biography aims to cast him in lyrical terms much in the same way ᶜAshiqi and many other tazkirah writers depicted Qizilbash Khan Ummid, and it is with good reason since the two appeared to have been "spiritually" connected.

There are no stories that illustrate how they met, but since both had been on the losing side of court intrigue in the course of their careers, they perhaps bonded over their individual good fortune at having emerged from controversy with heads attached. According to Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi (d. 1824), Niᶜmat Khan Sadarang and Qizilbash Khan Ummid had a spiritual agreement. According to the poet and diarist, Ummid would often say, "Oh Niᶜmat Khan, one day the you'll put the guitar of existence in the corner and, by God, on that same day the string on the harp of my life will snap!" (Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi 2007: 9). It was rumored that Ummid was sitting in

Muhammad Yar Khan's garden eating a watermelon when the news of Niʿmat Khan Sadarang's death reached him. All at once Qizilbash Khan Ummid let out a huge sigh and gave up his life, so Mus'hafi writes.

In many ways this anecdote is puzzling and leaves more questions than answers for the uninitiated reader. Why would this story circulate? What was the reason for their spiritual agreement (*itihād-i rūhānī*) or rather, why had the two of them been cast as characters in a story about a divine connection that only exist between two men? Clearly, Qizilbash Khan had righted his prayer direction toward Niʿmat Khan Sadarang and the two became intimate enough to attain union with God in the same breath, so to speak.

Available Singers

In the mushaʿirah setting the relationship between the Lover and Beloved was played out on several levels. On one setting, male performers themselves, usually the *qawwaāls* that would be taking part in gatherings, were objects of desire for the poets attending poetry gatherings. Secondly, the class of professional beloveds or courtesans, who were often trained as poets themselves, were sometimes part of the entertainment

396

hired for an evening of recitation, drinking, and flirtation. Since the poets were famous wits, they had no trouble concocting flirtatious and delightful verse.

Mir Hasan also cites a poem that was popular on the tongues of Indian singers (*mutribān-i hind*) by the wandering Sufi poet Qadr. He retrieves the entry from Mir Taqi Mir's tazkirah *Nikāt al-Shuʿarā*:

<div dir="rtl">

آج آئے ہو تو رہ جاؤ سجن رات کی رات

لیلۃ القدر سے بہتر ملاقات کی رات

</div>

Today you have come; so stay here late into the night, mister
A night of hooking up is better than the *lailat al-qadr.* (Mir 1972: 141)

Mir Taqi tells us that Qadr was often seen hanging around the alleys and bazaars in Delhi, was a general ruffian (*ūbāsh wazaʿ*), and composed verse in the language of catamites (*zabān-i ū ba-zabān-i lūtīyān mī mānad*). The poem is clearly a *Rekhtī* verse or a female-voiced ghazal that celebrates a non-normative, queer cosmopolitanism capable of imagining a female subjectivity (Vanita 2013: 256). The Hindi word *sajjan* (husband or male lover) indexes "women's speech" in *Rekhti* verse; Qadr also creates an *īhām* or pun off of his name with the Islamic term *laital al-qadr* or night of destiny which refers to the time when the Qurʾan was revealed to the prophet Muhammad, generally celebrated on 27th Ramadhan, and worship on this night is said to be worth 1,000 months of prayer.

397

Qadr the poet makes it into "Qadr's special night" or the *mulāqāt kī rāt*, destined for sexual revelation. These lines clearly have Sufi import as well, as the union with the Beloved could also be indexical for union with God, a state demanded of any prophet receiving a revealed text. That Mir uses the term *lūtī* is significant as well in the context of 18th-century views on sexuality in late-Mughal public culture. The term could be translated as "sodomite" since it refers to the cities of Sodom and Gomorra, the two cities where the Abrahamic prophet Lot was sent to preach against their populaces' sins; one of which was thought to be homosexuality.

Was Qadr a known homosexual in Delhi's bazaars flirting with the attractive men who walked by, crafting suggestive verse in the "catamites' tongue"? Perhaps. More importantly, Mir Hasan and Mir Taqi both note that in addition to being a Sufi these lines of his were quite popular in the bazaar. Only Mir Taqi takes the extra step in classifying Qadr's speech as catamite speech (*zabān-i lūtīyān*) which was clearly an effective and flirtatious way of composing verse.

In his autobiography, Mir presents a host of jokes about sodomy so perhaps calling Qadr a speaker of "catamite language" may have just been an instance of Mir playing of off the jokes on sodomy that were constantly being bandied back and forth

between poets. Yet, we have seen instances in which poets used sexually playful language to publicly comment on an erotic seen before them or an idea about sexually available performers. It seems this speech was also used to propositioned each other in the mushaʿirah space. At least Pakbaz used this tenor of language when commenting on his love affair with the *qawwāl* Makkhan which started in the mushaʿirahs he patronized in Lucknow.

Mus'hafi also circulates a rumor that Mir Taqi Mir himself was said to have had a love affair with the poet Mir Muhammad Yar Khaksar (c. 1740s) in his youth (Mus'hafi Hindi: 88). The two later had a falling out and Mir lambasts him in his own tazkirah for his arrogance:

> He takes great pride in his Urdu verse, but amazingly it is as much of a mess as he is personally. He tries to imitate [other famous poets] in every matter. For instance, if someone troubles him to recite a verse he would say, "When I was sick and sighing away even my sighs had such expression that, Lord be praised, people just happened to call it poetry. Baba, I do not write poetry. These brothers of Joseph who say they are poets—I have no connection with them. You do forgive me?" In short, he is very careless and quite lacking in depth. (1972: 114)

Khaksar tried to take revenge against Mir at one point when he accompanied the poet Rafiʿ Sauda to a gathering. Sauda narrated this incident to the poet Qaʾim :

One day Mir Khaksar and I were at the home of Murtazah Quli Firaq when this *bābā*, Khaksar, having brought up a complaint about Mir Taqi Mir at an inopportune moment in the gathering, troubled the attendees for a satire against the aforesaid Mir. Out of respect for their friendship with Mir Taqi, they were not enthusiastic about this prospect. But I, on the other hand, having jokingly cast an opening line on his behalf, presented this:

میر کا مکھڑا ہی نے تنہا گل زنبق سا ہے
پیٹ بھی اس کا جو میں دیکھا سو کچھ بھنبق سا ہے

It's not only the *mīr*'s face that seems like the flower called *zambaq*
From what I saw of his stomach, it too was like a *bhambaq*[157]

As soon as the the *majlis* attendees heard my verse, they could have died laughing and Khaksar also laughed be polite[—though he didn't get the joke at first]. A few moments passed in this manner when he saw that the others were not controlling their laughter. Then he glanced at his own belly, [understanding what happened,] and immediately got up to leave before uttering every filthy and insulting word in existence within our earshot. A few people objected [to his leaving] but it was to no avail. Since that day we've had no more connection. (Muhammad Qaʾim al-Din Qaʾim 1966: 141-2)

Khaksar tried to get the other musha'irah attendees to recite incentives (*hajv-hā*)

against his former lover, Mir Taqi Mir, but this backfired in the presence of the comedic

genius, Sauda. In the interest of decency the others chose not to oblige him, but Sauda

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[157] C.M. Naim wrties in a personal communication that the humor in the line relies upon the iris or *zambaq* having an ungainly appearance. Of course, the stomach itself is a hole or *bhambaq* that can never be filled. Perhaps, Sauda was joking about Khaksar's appetite—something he enjoyed doing in other poems most notably when he lampooned Mir Hasan's father, Zahik, for being a voluptuary.

turned the tables on Khaksar and wrote something ambiguous about *Mir* Taqi Mir and

Mir Muhammad Yar Khan Khaksar. At first Khaksar joins them in the laughter, thinking

Sauda was lambasting Mir Taqi, until he looks at his gut and realizes they are all

laughing at him and his insatiable appetites. A *bhambaq* is a gaping hole.

The rumor that Mir and Khaksar had a love affair cannot be substantiated, but it

did not appear to be a mark on Mir's reputation. Mus'hafi circulated the idea during

Mir's lifetime and he had no gripes with Mir either, clearly respecting him since his

school days in Delhi when the senior poet praised young Mus'hafi's verse at a

mushaʿirah according to a legend circulated by Muhammad Husain Azad. Yet, it is

interesting to examine this moment in light of Mir's commentary on Khaksar's

arrogance and feigned humility in the mushaʿirah setting. As discussed by C.M. Naim in

his commentary of the Mir's memoir *Zikr-i Mīr,* Qaʾim and Mir went back and forth in

their tazkirahs alluding to each other's proclivity for chasing after younger men. While

homosexuality was not criminalized as it was in Europe, calling someone a homosexual

was a common insult in a society where homoerotic relationships were frowned

upon.[158] We have to keep in mind that this was not a period in India's history where gendered and sexual identities had become as concrete and brittle as they would in the colonial and national eras. Persian literature's paradigmatic relationship is between a man and a youth (Naim 2004b). In the mushaʿirah context which attempts to sensually materialize the metaphors of lyric poetry, one would expect the Beloved himself to appear as an erotic object in the flesh.

Amir al-Din Ahmad (1756-1820?) was 23 years old when he began writing his tazkirah based on the anecdotes, particulars, and verses he had been collecting in his diary as he moved between the different cities of early colonial Awadh. What little we do know about him, he tells us in his 1779 tazkirah, *Musarrat-i Afzā.* In Allahabad during the early 1770s, this was one of Amr al-Din's many favorite stops, he visited a poet named Shah Muhammad Waqif, or Shah Waqif for short, who was a known Sufi with a lover's disposition and a colorful personality who frequented the town's mushaʿirahs where he entertained his friends with his wit and charm (Abu al-Hasan Amir al-Din

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[158] One of the wittier poetic instances of insulting a fellow poet by calling him a catamite is from the 16th century poet Mulla Shaida where he uses a Qurʾanic phrase to make it seem like God too aimed to insult Shaida's colleague.

I'm not the only one who says Amir Allah is "acted upon;"
God thus decreed in the Qurʾan, "Amir Allah is a 'bottom.'"

نه تنها من همی گویم که امر الله مفعول است
خدا فرموده در قرآن که   أَمْرُ اللهِّ مَفْعُولًا

402

Ahmad Amr Allah Allahabadi 1968: 251; 1998: 154) However, one day he fell in love with a beautiful Mughal boy whose grace and attractiveness was the talk of the town (*zabānzad-i khalq*), since he was the apple of the world's eye (*manzūr-i nazar-i ʿālamī*). As luck would have it, Shah Waqif's beloved returned his feelings and the two "drank from the glass of union" and were negligent to their social duties. Waqif's friends, perhaps missing his presence at Allahabad's gatherings, tattled on them both to the young man's father who lived in a nearby town, telling the father that his son had become an "object of ridicule" in Allahabd. After the boy was called back home, Waqif became truly depressed, but it proved productive to his writing and from then on he was able to instantaneously craft a poem according to whatever circumstances he might be in. Amr al-Din must have been there when Shah Waqif started going to mushaʿirahs again after losing his *mughal-bacchah* boyfriend. The diarist records several verses that Waqif recited after losing his boyfriend (see Appendix O), including this one: "So this is the justice in your house, oh corrupting world!," recited Waqif, "The house of rivals thrives, and my household is overturned!"

Amir al-Din probably heard these lines and Waqif's story from the poet himself at a mushaʿirah or in some other social setting. It's also probable that he took the story

403

and the lines from another participant's pocket diary. I base this judgment on the way

the lines are arranged in the tazkirah as if from a sketch of verses that someone had

memorized or jotted done while they heard them. The first two lines are ending verses

or *maqta*ʿs, the next one is from the middle of a ghazal, and the last couplet is a *matla*ʿ or

opening verse. Recording the lines in this manner differs from the other verse samples

in Waqif's entry which are arranged with more internal coherence.

The improvised-sounding lines indeed reflect the narrative as they squarely

allude to separation from the Beloved. To an extent, any ghazal would reflect Waqif's

experience given that it conforms to the ghazal's central lyrical trope of erotic

ambivalence. Perhaps Amir al-Din embellished the tale so it would fit with these lines

by a poet named Waqif. However, rather than enter into the hoary argument of veracity

in the tazkirah tradition, I would posit that the story and the lines are true in the logic

of our larger discussion on sensuality and eroticism in the mushaʿirah experience. The

lines are uttered or imagined to be uttered in the context of an idealized erotic

relationship between an older man and a young boy spoiled after the poet's meddling

friends alerted the boy's father to the affair in order to get Waqif back into Allahabad's

mushaʿirah. It would seem the friends wanted to be entertained again and what better

way to get more achingly delightful poetry out of Waqif than to deny him sexual gratification in order get him back in their literary circle.

Waqif's return to recitation is a moment in which the very structure of mushaʿirah historiography as told by tazkirah authors conforms to lyrical, cultural, and idealized forms of early modern erotic sociability in late-Mughal India. As discussed in the first chapter where we examined mushaʿirah verse that parallels the function of the *majlis*, Amir al-Din's story about Waqif materializes the erotic or sensual nature of institutionalized poetry recitation.

Conclusion

The social realms' affairs and bawdy verse parallels the idealized script of Persian poetry, bringing us back to the case of our two paradigmatic mushaʿirah participants, Ummid and Sadarang. To answer the question about Sadarang and Ummid's "spiritual pact," it was a product of them being erotic paragons of manly spiritual love, values often alluded to and at times put on display in the mushaʿirah context. That the two of them were musicians who sang verse like David would the psalms, heightens their erotic and artistic potential as paradigmatic lyric characters.

While Sadarang was not a *qawwāl* per se, he was part of a class of musicians understood

to be sexually available by certain segments of Delhi's populace in the mid-18th

century, notably by the elite and semi-elite writers and nobleman who could afford to

patronize and proposition musicians in Mughal society. As a small time land-grant

holder well connected with the courts, Qizilbash Khan Ummid held a higher social rank

than Sadarang who, while patronized by the elite, was still a public performer bound by

Mughal social norms on musicians and singers.

The mushaʿirah space as an institution for *majlis*-based sociability turned

eroticism of the sensual kind into a consumable public ideation through recited and

sung verse. Since the aural sphere was linked with all kinds of sensual appetites, it

would be expected to find paradigmatic musicians and poets link Sadarang and Ummid

inhabiting a setting as paradigmatic male Lovers in the idealized lyrical sense. That's

not to say their relationship was solely spiritual, for it certainly appears to be erotic in

the context of our discussion on the sensual, prophetic, and social aspects of sung verse

in the mushaʿirah setting. In concentrating on the literary sensorium chronicled in

tazkirah histories we can see how there are moments where the tropic logic of the

ghazal universe breaks through into the social practices of mushaʿirah poets. The

musha'irah makes the Beloved a reality as it certainly did for Ummid in Sadarang.

When Sadarang died, Ummid soon followed him to the "feast of *alast*" with a belly full

of watermelon and a heart full of song.

Chapter 5
At the Grave of Bedil: A 1700s Musha'irah's Post-mortem Analysis

In March 1739, Nadir Shah sacked the heart of Delhi. This newly self-proclaimed king of Persia massacred Chandni Chowk's residents and leveled homes around the Jama' Masjid.[159] He fined the Mughal India's emperor and his nobles and sent his troops to the walled city's neighborhoods to extract tribute for the exiting army (Eliot 1877).[160] According to legend, Nadir Shah shared something in common with Arzu and other Delhi poets: in his youth he had been insulted by the arrogant Iranian Hazin. Another poetic legend holds that the warlord did not stop his troops pillaging the city until Nizam al-Mulk Asif Jah recited a line by the famous Persian-language poet Amir Khusrao (d.1325):

کسی نماند که دیگر به تیغ ناز کشی
مگر تو زنده کنی خلق را باز کشی

Even was there is no one left that you would kill with that flirtatious dagger—
You bring the people to life so you can just murder them again.

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[159] Nadir Shah was from Khurasan and unified an Iran at the end of the Safavid's decline. In some ways, he one of the last Turkic invaders in the tradition of Genghis Khan, Hulugu Khan, Timur, or Babar to attempt to create an empire in the Iranian plateau and the subcontinent.

[160] Nasir al-Din Muhammad Shah (r. 1719-1748)

Hearing this, "the fire of Persian warlord's anger died down" and he ordered the killing to cease with this line:

همه شهر پر ز خوبان منم و خیال ماهی

چه کنم که چشم بدخو نکند به کس نگاهی

The whole city is filled with the best people and here I am dreaming of the moon
What should I do when he gives no one even a glimpse of his scornful eyes?
(Husain Quli Khan ʿAshiqi 2012: 562).

In May, two months after the conquest and this legendary exchange, poet ʿAbd al-Wali ʿUzlat (1692-1775) visited Delhi for more humble literary gatherings with less violent implications. The wrecked homes and perhaps lingering smell of death must have been striking to him. Like other members of the Persian-educated classes trekking to Delhi, ʿUzlat sought patronage and camaraderie in the Mughal capital where he found it thriving in spite of Nadir Shah's blood bath. Delhi still maintained its place as the heart of India's Persophone literary world as poets from India, the Iranian plateau, and Central Asia congregated there. ʿUzlat had journeyed from the port city of Surat in present day Gujarat from where he had just come back and forth from the south where Nizam al-Mulk Asif Jah, the local governor of Hyderabad—another city noted for its literary patronage—had briefly employed ʿUzlat as a man of letters and cultivation.

There ʿUzlat participated the city's literary gatherings in the local court, in poets' homes, and on the streets and had similar intentions for his trip to Delhi even though it had recently been sacked.

The late 19th-century poet Shad Azimabadi (1846-1927) chronicles some of this post-1739 literary scene through the memories of his teacher Ulfat Husain Faryad (1804-1880) whose two maternal uncles, Jamal Husain Jamal and Waras ʿAli Ashki (c. 1770s?), came to the city to study with Mir Dard (1721-1785). Expounding on his teacher's memories, Shad writes:

> And what a city Delhi was that in spite of the coming days' looting and pillaging, the nobility's destruction, and more than half the city emptying—not to mention the unemployment—there wouldn't be even one week where on some block or other there wouldn't be a mushaʿirah gathering. (Sayyid ʿAli Muhammad Shad Azimabadi 1927: 165-6)

In his teacher's memory, the civic violence did not stop Delhi's poets from holding regular poetry gatherings. A contemporary writer, Dargah Quli Khan (d. 1766), who had come from the south to help defend against Nadir Shah's invasion, noted an impresario named Latif Khan whose music and poetry gatherings also kept going even though their attendance dropped after the attack and Latif had to give up a great deal of his wealth as tribute for the Persian Shah (Dargah Quli Khan 1993: 70). In this context, the

city's literati and other visiting writers must have welcomed ʿUzlat in the gatherings of 1739 as another brother-in-arms helping to keep the salons and soirees active in spite of the devastation. Contemporary accounts attest that ʿUzlat shared his verse and made lasting connections with the local circle of Persian poets and the city's emerging coterie of Persophone writers composing lyrics in the vernacular called *Hindavī* or *Rekhtah* which we today call Urdu.

In fact ʿUzlat's 1739 trip to Delhi coincided with the arrival of several poets. Qizilbash Khan Ummid (d. 1746) had just arrived from Hyderabad via Bhopal, coming from Lahore ʿAbd al-Hakim Hakim (1707-1769) arrived that same year, and a young writer from Agra named Mir Muhammad Taqi Mir (1723-1810) who sought instruction and the courtly connections of his uncle also came. Mir, who would later emerge as one of the most famous Urdu poets of his generation, met ʿUzlat at his uncle Arzu's house, where he was staying at the time, during one of the many soirees Delhi's poets regularly held there. When Mir would later assemble his own tazkirah a decade later, he

used entries from ʿUzlat's own diary for Urdu poets from the South that he must have

met before coming to Delhi.[161]

As with other poets visiting the city, a stop on ʿUzlat's tour was a yearly

mushaʿirah in which Delhi's literati would congregate for bibliomancy followed by the

recitation of their original work at the grave of one of their own, a poet-saint, teacher,

musician, and seller of potions who had died on December 4, 1720. ʿAbd al-Qadir Bedil

(b. 1642) had long been a literary and philosophical focal point in the Mughal city

where he had connected his verses with ongoing debates on religious mysticism and

local Islam, writing in the *tāzah-goʾī* or "fresh-speaking" style of Indo-Persian literature

read and recited from Samarqand to Calcutta during the early modern era. As a popular

semi-religious figure and fresh-speaking poet, Bedil cast a striking image in Delhi with

his high declarative singing voice, his complex poetic imagery, and his completely

shaved head, eyebrows, and beard. He was also notably strong and a healthy eater

according to some. In short, Bedil was an active character in the heterogenous social

milieu that pervaded 17th and 18th-century Mughal society where he kept company

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[161] ʿUzlat ended up sharing his travel diary with ʿAli al-Husaini Gardezi (d. 1809) as well who completed his compendium a year after Mir. Bindraban Das Khushgu (d. 1756), a Hindu poet from Mathura trained for the Persian language economy, also met ʿUzlat on several occasions while editing his Persian tazkirah *Safīnah-i Khūsghū* (compiled between 1724 and 1748), noting where ʿUzlat interjected a few comments.

with courtesans, Hindu yogis, Sufi saints, literary minded patrons, and his many students and disciples. On the outskirts of Delhi's *khekarīyān mahollah* on the edge of *Guzar Ghāt*, Bedil's patron Nawab Shakr Allah Khan (c. 1690s) bought him a mansion for around 5,000 rupees and gave Bedil a daily allowance of two rupees. Bedil spent his remaining years there holding many mushaʿirahs (*mushāʿirāt;* singular *mushāʿirah*) or poetry gatherings for the city's musicians, Sufis, fellow poets, patrons, and assorted listeners that would last late into the night, filled with loud verse-singing, drinking, hookah-smoking, and the ubiquitous exchange of witticisms, jokes, and anecdotes that abounded in 18th-century Delhi's social gatherings and literary salons.

This chapter seeks to understand Bedil's yearly graveside mushaʿirah as a material example of Persian-based literary sociability cast according to vernacular cultural practices at a time when poets were asking who could innovate literary language and how far it could be pushed stylistically. Bedil's graveside mushaʿirah was one of the most well documented events of the era and in this regard it was uniquely public in comparison to the largely private gatherings examined to this point in the present study. Poets like ʿUzlat and Mir came from other parts of India to participate in what was essentially a poetry reading within a Sufi gathering. Shrine veneration had

been a popular religious practice in South and Central Asia since before the arrival of

Islam. With the spread of a Persian language cosmopolis and the Islamic veneration of

saints, poets were included in this realm of religious and intellectual representatives to

the point of making them saintly prophetic figures whose graves also became

destinations for intercession or *tawassul* in the geography of Sufism's shrines .

The "fresh-speaking" approach to verse composition had been hotly debated

beginning in early 16th century as this "modern" style pushed the boundaries of the

"ancient" style inherited from Persian literature's earlier writers like Hafiz, Saʿdi, and

Nizami among many others. Bedil was arguably one of the most famous exponents of

late *tāzah-goʾī* stylistics even after his passing. Bedil had developed a unique approach to

poetry and philosophy that concentrated on understanding Ibn al-ʿArabi's argument

for a "unity of being," posing this epistemological argument as "the dilemma of the

ontological necessity of speech versus the epistemological problem of the ineffability of

Reality" (Kovacs 2013: abstract). Given this wedding of communicative aesthetic and

critical religious paradigms, Bedil was quickly vaulted in the realm of a saint whereby

his former disciple, Arzu among the most notable, propagated an ʿ*urs.* This is a

celebration like a wedding but in the metaphorical sense whereby a saint's death is

remembered as a day to celebrate his or her union with the divine. The poets and disciples at Bedil's grave they utilized an instantiated Sufi lexicon on poets' tombs as points of intercession and devotion. In the literary sphere, the shrines of poets have particular significance. In the 18th century, Hafiz and Saʿdi's tombs (the *Hāfiziyah* and *Saʿdiyah*) had long been destinations for verse recitation and are still visited today. In Delhi's mid-1700s it was Bedil's grave that became a landmark for similar intercession and literary sociability at a time when Delhi was still eclipsing Isfahan in the patronage of Persian literary production.

The mushaʿirah as a literary space prizes the circulation of verse for enjoyment. Accordingly, the historian should as well. Much of our view of the mushaʿirah's literary sociability has been refracted through 19th-century understandings of Urdu and Persian literary cultures in North India. This was a time when Muslim sovereignty and political identity were being questioned through paradigms that were not present in 18th-century Delhi. Some contemporary historians have had the tendency to cast novelists' imaginary mushaʿirahs as symbols for lost Mughal culture, though the mushaʿirah has thrived since its inception and these historical telling suffer from a misplaced nostalgia for this lost sovereignty (see Introduction above).

This misplaced sense of the mushaʿirah disappearing has driven some scholars and novelists to ask that we "reconstruct" the mushaʿirah (Dudney 2013: 23-4). In the tazkirah tradition, the formal aspects of mushaʿirah-based verse, that is the poetry itself and its modes of representation, are enough to tell its story which they have more than adequately done in the course of the present study. After all, the mushaʿirah's goal, first and foremost, has always been to facilitate the enjoyment and exchange of verse itself, and to realize the aesthetic rationale behind Persophone imitative originality in all its playfulness and delight.

To understand the foundational importance of Bedil's posthumous mushaʿirah, in this chapter I concentrate on four areas. First, I analyze the playfulness of mushaʿirah anecdotes and Islamicate ideas on prophets and poets—an old concept with Arabian roots that had gained traction in Bedil's and later Mir Dard's circles. Secondly, I look at the wider network of shrines, mosques, and madrasahs that formed poets' recitational maps, comparing the Indian context with anecdotes about Hafiz and Saʿdi's graves. The third section investigates the spirit of debate and correction attached to the mushaʿirah in the context of Bedil's personality and later the grave mushaʿirah itself as his students used the space to engage contentious arguments on meaning and theme

416

that had been circulating in Persian poetry circles in India since the early 1600s. Lastly, I look at the vernacular shift to Urdu which took on new importance in the 1740s. By 1760 or so, the Urdu poet Rafiʿ Sauda (1713-1781) used Bedil's ʿurs gatherings to lambast a fellow Persian language poet through an imitative quotation or *tazmīn,* throwing the original Persian ghazal back in his rival's face as an Urdu quintain.

For Bedil's ʿurs mushaʿirah and its anecdotes, I advocate an analysis that concentrates on the modes of debate between poets, their critique of stylistic registers, and the implicit cultural commentaries made in recited verse and prose. As I have done through out this work, I advocate a nuanced reading of mushaʿirah anecdotes where their narratives provide an implicit formal analysis of a given anecdote's verse. Context tells us the larger sociological, cultural, and historical background of an anecdote, but attention to meaning, theme, and meter, values in which the poets themselves were highly interested, adds nuance not just to an anecdote's narrative, but to the multiplicity of meanings implicit in the writing itself.

I proffer this analysis of mushaʿirah verse and anecdotes for several reasons. First, to embed mushaʿirah into the vast and socially relevant world of Persophone literature as a performed and social entity secures it in the hands of the poets, listeners,

417

and patrons who populate it. Meaning, theme, and the poetic language were hugely

contentious issues during the 18th century so we would do well to pay attention,

looking for critiques the poets themselves would level at recited verse. Secondly, while

verse itself is what forms the institution, to exam the mushaʿirah from only a literary

stance flattens the social implications of meaning, theme, and literary form. Instead, by

reading the verse as structuring social relations, we can better understand the

instantiated nature of poetry recitation as a mode of popular or everyday literary

practice pursued by people from a variety of gender, class, and religious backgrounds.

Though most of the writers discussed are men with high social standing, it is significant

to note that people previously imagined to be at the periphery of literary history—such

as the lower classes and women—make a significant contribution to literary circles.

Thus, by understanding literature or literary production as a social process in and of

itself, we can create a theory of mushaʿirah literature and institutions of poetry

recitation based on the notions and assumptions about poetry gatherings with which

18th-century Urdu and Persian writers were familiar.

    Two decades later after ʿUzlat had left Delhi and was back in Surat, the poet and

compendium writer Ghulam ʿAli Azad Bilgrami (1704-1785) passed through the port city

on his way back from a pilgrimage to Mecca (1913: 234). When they met, ʿUzlat told him about his experience at the *majlis* or gathering on Bedil's death anniversary. Delhi's poets gathered to read their verse, but before they did Bedil's works written in the saint's own hand was passed around the gathering circle and each poet read a few lines from the tome. ʿUzlat still had a fresh memory of the event that evening:

> On the day of Mirza Bedil's ʿurs I went to the foot of his grave. The poets of Delhi were gathered together, and bringing out Bedil's complete works in agreed custom, began to hold a *majlis.* I opened the complete works with the intention that the saint would have some news of my coming and at the top of the page this *matlaʿ* (opening line) appeared:

$$باشم خورده عدم در خون مقدار چه$$
$$باشم مرده من و آئی خاکم بر که$$

> What ever amount of blood I have sustained in non-existence-
> You came upon my dust and I must have already died.

As the book made its way around the gathering circle, ʿUzlat had the serendipity to open the *kullīyāt* or collected works to a novel verse appropriate for the occasion. "The friends saw it too and they witnessed Mirza Bedil's miracle," ʿUzlat commented when he related the event to Azad some years later. Reading the verse aloud to the gathering of poets listeners and other supplicants at Bedil's tomb, ʿUzlat recited a bibliomantic miracle: he came nineteen years too late and the moldering saint knew it.

5.1 Prophets' Histories and Mischievous Recitation, c. 1710

عرض معراج حقیقت از من بیدل مپرس
قطره دریا گشت پیغمبر نمی دانم چه شد

Oh Bedil, don't ask me for a report of the Prophet's actual journey to heaven. A droplet of the ocean became a message bearer, beyond that I don't know what happened.

It is no surprise Bedil requested to be buried in the compound of his mansion, where he held his raucous gatherings for poets. Once the writer and poet Bindraban Das Khushgu (1677-1756) urged his close friend and fellow poet Saʿd Allah Gulshan (d. 1728) to accompany him to Bedil's home where the poet Muhammad Afzal Sarkhush (1640-1715), a chronicler of Delhi's literary scene in the 1680s with his own devoted following, would be meeting with the poet-saint. Since Sarkhush and Bedil had been apart for some time for various reasons, when Gulshan and Khushgu arrived Sarkhsuh said to them, "Do you two want to see some elephants fight?" (*hawas-i tamāshā-yi jang-i felān dārīd*). In reference to his impending verse exchange with Bedil, Sarkhush was then inspired to dash off this line that he recited for everyone there:

از فضل حق ز هر دو جهان رم گرفته‌ایم
یک درگرفته‌ایم و چه محکم گرفته‌ایم

420

> Grace be to God! I have grabbed heaven and earth by the balls!
> To do this, I just grab one and then I just hold on tightly. [162]

If we remember from Chapter Three, Sarkhush thought himself a kind of saintly figure to the displeasure of Gulshan. In his mind, being a prophet would require this type of decisiveness.

As we have seen so far, the historiography of the mushaʿirah is anecdotal. Diarists like Hakim Lahori, Azad Bilgrami, or even Dargah Quli Khan were intent on capturing examples of rhetorical flourish indicative of personal accomplishment within a community of literary peers, but it seems they also wanted to entertain their readers who were often times the very literary community about which the wrote. For late Mughal society, the mushaʿirah was a semi-public space for the circulation of orally transmitted verse in a society that prized recited words over written documentation. The mushaʿirah was a semi-elite, institutional and constituent of the "courtly milieu, [where] the oral setting, for poetry at least, was never completely eclipsed by book

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[162] If we remember from Chapter Three Sarkhush thought himself a kind of prophet to the displeasure of Gulshan. To an extent, being a prophet would require this type of decisiveness. Khushgu notes that Arzu, a student of Bedil, corrected Sarkhush's line to this:

با یاد حق ز هر دو جهان رم گرفته‌ایم

With the memory of God, I have grabbed the two worlds by the balls.

culture" (Sharma 2009a: 24). Yet, the only representations we have of the musha'irah

can be found in diarists' narratives, the ancillary textual representations of literary

sociability. The tazkirah tradition embodies the contradictory and heterogenous public

it seeks to represent in that it captures the subjective memories of its writers and the

community in which they were writing. By and large, this is the only source that

documents gatherings during this time period and the goals of their authors vary, but

are all undergirded by a shared narrative style and anecdotal focus towards novel

occurrences and verses. Namely, they are historical "memorative" remnants of public

life, capturing a partial but highly entertaining aspect of Mughal-Safavid public culture

(Hermansen and Lawrence 2000; see Kinra 2008: 208). Tazkirah writers relied on oral

sources and diaries passed around between friends and acquaintances in addition to

other compendiums that had come before which they often read closely and critically.

The information, if piecemeal, often reflects writers' social circles and their immediate

literary spheres, while detailing the style of their textual practices—did they use others'

diaries? Were they writing for a revered teacher or close friend? Was it an attempt to

capture a kind of universal literary history?[163] When writing about the musha'irah's

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[163] Bindraban Das Khushgu's famous Safīnah reads like an autograph book at times as he has his musha'irah attendees write their verses and particulars down when they would come to his house.

historiography as a socio-literary institution, one has to reassemble the archeological

connections between the tazkirah tradition's heterogeneous mix of topics and

commentaries. While there are occasional anecdotes to be found about Bedil's

mushaʿirahs, as we saw above, it's his graveside poetry gatherings that were the most

well-documented mushaʿirah in the 1700s. The details that emerge from historical

account are many ways more complete and intriguing than even 19th-century tellings.

Dargah Quli Khan, like ʿUzlat, had come to Delhi from Hyderabad with his

patron Nizam al-Mulk Asif Jah, the regional governor appointed by the waning Mughal

imperium to help defend against Nadir Shah's coming incursions. Dargah Quli Khan

made good use of his time in Delhi going to gatherings, brothels, and popular religious

festivals. Though he wrote dismissively of some the excesses he witnessed, Quli Khan

also gives seductive descriptions of the many attractions Delhi had to offer at the time;

it would seem a waste of words and energy had he not partaken in the delights. Bedil's

ʿurs mushaʿirah was a well-attended and popular affair that brought Delhi's larger

populace out for the celebration and medicinal tinctures that Bedil's cousin sold to the

crowd which numbered in the hundreds according to contemporary accounts (Arzu

2004: 241; Khushgu 1959: 103). An autograph copy of Bedil's complete works was kept

nearby for the gathering and one of his students who was popular at the event, Gul

Muhammad Shaʿr, also known as Maʿni Yab Khan (d. 1744),[164] brought out Bedil's sword

and wooden staff—sarcastically nicknamed "the willow branch" (naulāsī) on account of

the staff being so heavy (Bilgrami 1929:235; Khushgu 1959: 111).

The attending poets first randomly read from Bedil's works before presenting

their original compositions. Dargah Quli Khan quotes the following rubāʿi or quatrain

on the title page of Bedil's works:

<div dir="rtl">

ای آینه طبع تو ارشاد پذیر

در کسب فواید نمائی تقصیر

مجموعهٔ فکر ما صلای عام است

سیری کن و قسمت تسلی برگیر

</div>

You with the mirror-like nature, this command take:
In harlotry conspicuous piety is a mistake.
My book of poems is an open invitation for everyone.
Peruse it, and of your fate, some consolation take.

The quatrain is a fitting beginning to Bedil's works alluding to the popular setting in

which it was read. As Arzu himself notes in his description of the ʿurs, the devotees

would prepare food to serve to the mass of humanity (khalāʾiq) that attended the event

(Arzu 2004: 241). Like other opening verses of a dīwān, the verse is a hamd or

benediction to the Creator, and like many hamd verses the speaker comments on God's

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[164] It was rumored that Maʿni Yab Khan died while having sex (Khushgu 1959:PAGE).

playfulness or *shokhī*; God's uttering creation into existences involves a playfulness that parallels the poet's creative abilities in recitation. Two generations later a student of Bedil's inheritance, Mirza Asad Allah Ghalib (1797-1869), would open his Urdu *dīwān* with a famous verse illustrating this same point:

<div dir="rtl">

نقش فریادی ہے کس کی شوخیِ تحریر کا
کاغذی ہے پیرہن ہر پیکرِ تصویر کا

</div>

> How can the impression of written mischievousness be a plaintiff?[165]
> The robe of every figure in the painting is made of paper.

Bedil's opening quatrain as read in the event leads his listeners, and us as the readers, into the poetic realm of prophetic speech—something both playful and sagacious. Nasir ʿAli Sirhindi (1638-1697), another *tāzah-goʿī* poet from the generation preceding Bedil's, illustrates this tension of prophetic speech with an opening line in his *dīwān* that alludes to God's revealing himself on Mt. Sinai:

<div dir="rtl">

الہٰی شوخی برق تجلی دہ زبانم را
قبول خاطر موسیٰ نگاہاں کن بیانم را

</div>

> Oh God, give the brilliance of lighting's mischievousness to my tongue!
> For the sake of Moses, accept and behold my speech![166] (ʿAli 1875:1)

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[165] The word *naqsh* means impression in the widest possible sense, referring to printing, painting, or even others' regard. The word *tahrīr* has connotations of freedom and release.

[166] Urdu poet Akbar Allahabadi (1846-1921) later weaves this into a *naʿt* in praise of Muhammad.

The ghazal's speakers show that for poets and listeners there is a tension between the unruly tongue and the formal act of speech, a moment of rhetorical brilliance where utterance embodies mischievousness. That moment is, in fact, prophetic. For the poet, as with the prophet, vocal utterance in a social setting means to impart metered and rhymed speech with a level of truthfulness that cannot be assailed by only rational arguments—though the recitational gathering is a setting for rational debate on appropriate poetic usage.

Around 1696, when in his late fifties, Bedil happened to meet Nasir ʿAli Sirhindi (*ham sohbat uftand*) in a gathering hosted by his Shiʿi patron Shukr Allah Khan. Hailing from a family of Sayyids from the city of Khvaf near Nishapur in present day Iran, Shukr Allah Khan had been appointed the governor of Mewat under emperor ʿAlamgir Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) and was heavily involved in patronizing Persian literature to the point of exchanging a detailed correspondence with Nasir ʿAli on the nature of literature, beauty, and perception (Lodi 1998: 208-210). Nasir ʿAli was nearing the end of life, but had been a popular "fresh-speaking" writer during his time, intimately familiarizing himself with the verse of Saʾib (1601/2-1677). At Shukr Allah's mushaʿirah, Bedil recited a ghazal opening with this line:

426

نشد آئینهٔ کیفیت ما ظاهر آرایی

نهان ماندیم چون معنی به چندین لفظ پیدایی

The mirror of my state was not reflective;
I remained hidden like the meaning of these self-evident words.

Nasir ʿAli objected to Bedil's utterance on the grounds that it was against literary convention (*khilāf-i dastūr*): "Isn't meaning a word's subject? Wherever an utterance is manifest its meaning should undoubtedly be clear." Bedil had a quick rejoinder. Smiling, he said, "You think that a meaning is the word's subject, but an utterance is not that much. After all, the phrase 'from which the she is the she and he is the he' (*min hethu hiya hiya wa huwa huwa*) has meaning and but not in the words themselves. For instance, take the reality of mankind: in spite of all the details and explanations entered into books, nothing is revealed (*hīch makshuf na-gardīdah*)." Nasir ʿAli became quiet (Lodi 1968: 250).[167]

Lodi's depiction of Bedil and Nasir ʿAli paints the mushaʿirah as a space not only for debating poetic convention, as we might expect, but also for arguing the very basis of semiotics and interpretation. If we follow Bedil's ghazal and the rejoinder to Nasir

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[167] Mir Taqi Mir records an anecdote where Nasir ʿAli asks one of Bedil's students what the master is writing these days. The student responds that Bedil is writing the Chahar Unsur or The Four Elements, his magnum opus on Sufistic themes. Nasir ʿAli laughs and says, "Why waste your time? Any day now these four elements that we are made of will disintegrate. Better that you make some sense of the five days of life" (Mir 1999:138-9, trnas. by C.M. Naim).

ʿAli, the utterance as remembered in an institutionalized recitational event exists in

constant tension with, on one hand, the organic memory of the larger literary

community involved, and, on the other, the need to capture the event, its eloquence,

and its context on the page. In short, the anecdote is highly intertextual. Bedil is using a

Sufi concept to conceptualize words' ineffable meanings. In Sufi cosmology God is said

to have a mirror-like nature to reflect creation, and the Lover in the lyrical logic of the

ghazal also polishes the mirror of his heart to better reflect the nature of God. For this

reason mirrors were a particularly powerful theme in Bedil's ghazal poety. In the

opening line to his Persian *dīwān* Bedil had written this:

آیینه بر خاک زد صنع یکتا
تا وانمودند کیفیت ما

> The One cast a mirror upon the earth.
> So He could show off my state.

The mirror itself was cast with rare earth metals in pre-modern times and Islamic

thought holds that mankind was cast from clay as opposed to angels which were made

of fire or *jinns* made of smokeless fire; the mirror is both of the earth and reflective of

mankind's earthen nature. Or the line could be read such that the Beloved threw the

mirror to the earth (*bar khāk zad*) thus displaying the Lover's broken state in never

attaining the Beloved.

428

To return to the musha'irah setting, Bedil's verse is delightfully and philosophically self-referential in a way that only certain types of verse appropriate for the musha'irah context could be. The anecdote and Bedil's mirror complicate our understanding of public poetry recitation at several levels. Ironically, Sher 'Ali Khan Lodi noted this anecdote in his tazkirah entitled *Mirʾāt al-Khayāl* or *The Mirror of Imagination.* We have a clear presentation of an interchange in a recitational setting where two noted literary personalities contest the ways in which lyrical convention allows for a topic and its associated meanings to be deployed. They debate *ma'nī āfrīnī* or development of meaning, a hallmark of Persophone literary creativity where a speaker weaves novel strands of meaning into the web of accepted lyrical tropes. The anecdote holds to a belief in Persian and Urdu popular history that the "classical" musha'irah was a ring for literary debate.

If we remember from the preceding chapters, this type of linguistic and semantic playfulness were welcome qualities in the 1700s musha'irah. Delight has been an abiding quality in all the anecdotes we examined giving us a clue into the logic of the musha'irah's form of communicative speech. The debate, as narrated in Lodi's compendium, shows us another musha'irah verse playing with the ambiguity of its own

recitation, yet another example of the self-reflexive verse we've been examining

throughout this work. Nasir ʿAli, rightly, tries to take issue with it, asking, "which

meaning are you referring to?" Is it the meaning of the gnostic mirror in the heart of

creation and God? Or is it the import of the ghazal itself? Bedil's second line simply

illustrates the highest goal of mushaʿirah verse which urges its listeners to look for

meaning that will never appear. As demonstrated in Bedil's verse and the other self-

reflexive verse seen through out this project, the point is hide meaning in the clearest

explanation possible. And only in the recitational realm can poets so directly play with

the slippery semiotic potential of self-referential verses like this that generate an

infinite feedback loop of ambiguous poetic intentions. We well see more of them in the

coming pages.

From this stance, mushaʿirah poetry and mushaʿirah anecdotes captured in

tazkirahs present an implicit critique of the late-Mughal literary sphere, where

entertaining recitations like Bedil's above use ambiguous language to create

subjectivities that resist definition, showing the intersection of social and aesthetic

forces in a lyrical form of public life. Scholarship on Urdu and Persian literatures has

not adequately understood the full possibilities of the mushaʿirah as a socio-literary

institution for highly complex forms of speech play and verbal art, especially at a contestable moment in the 18th century during the rise of Urdu as a literary language. Previous writers have suggested that the social context has some implication for the production of verse, but to look at a context where sociability and language artisanship are combined shows us new potentials for seeing how language creates subjectivities. For instance patronage and the *ustād-shāgird* relationship have guided literary production and they still do to this day (Faruqi 2002). However, we ought to take the next step with this supposition that literature itself is shaping society—or rather literature *is* society in the case of the early modern mushaʿirah.

Jürgen Habermas writes that in reading popular print weeklies the 18th-century British public, "held up a mirror to itself; it did not yet come to a self-understanding through the detour of a reflection on works of philosophy and literature, art and science, but through entering itself into 'literature' as an object" (Habermas 1992: 43). To extend Habermas' mirror into 18th-century India, through reading and debating about lyrical usages, one could say Mughal-Safavid society read and debated about itself. The strong links between popular, saint-based Islamic practices, and vernacular literatures reinforce this position where poets, listeners, and patrons entered

themselves into lyric poetry as objects. Bedil's invocation of the mirrors of gnosis within God and creation complicates this notion to the point where Habermas' idea is turned around: in the mushaʿirah lyrical objects are brought into the world. This idea of lyrical objects coming into the world will be developed further below, but here it serves to allow us to begin examining its potential in Bedil's mirrors.

Bedil refers to competing aspects of the mirrors of gnosis embedded in the hearts of mankind and God himself in the quatrain heading his *kullīyāt* sitting by his tomb (*aʾe āʾīnah tabaʿ, tū irshād pazīr*), in the opening line of the *dīwān* (*āʾīnah bar khāk zad sānaʿ yaktah*), and in the verse uttered at Shukr Allah Khan's gathering (*nashud āʾīnah-i kaifīyat-i ma zāhir ārāʾī*). The gathering at the graveside sought to connect the community of poets and listeners with Bedil's memory through an aesthetic intervention that in some ways parallels Shukr Allah Khan's poetry recitation in which Bedil engaged Nasir ʿAli. Shukr Allah Khan's mushaʿirah becomes a setting for two *tāzah-goʾi* poets to debate not only lyrical convention but also the very existence of meaning behind words themselves. The anecdote as part of a larger narration on Bedil the poet within a constellation of Persian (and later Urdu) poets is meant to reveal something rhetorically and philosophically poignant. The seemingly nonsensical Arabic

phrase that Bedil uses to refute Nasir ʿAli (from which the she is the she and he is the he), alludes to the unity of being which can only be reflected through the mirror of gnosis embedded in the hearts of humankind and in God himself. Bedil's mirror does not reflect material existence alone, but shapes it and reconfigures it according to the delight and playfulness of lyrical convention. As a prophet would, the speech act in the mushaʿirah reconfigures reality itself according to higher poetic and aesthetic laws.

In this regard, the relationship between the prophet and the poet is a complicated one in South Asian Muslim society. In Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, and Urdu literary traditions the border between the two was not always clear (Chadwick 1952; Kugel 1990; Stetkevych 1993; Leavitt 1997; Shoham 2003; Halevi 2007). Muhammad Afzal Sarkhush (d. 1715) in *Kalimāt al-Shuʿrā* (c. 1693) quotes a line from Nizami's long poem "*Makhzan-i Asrār*" (*The Treasury of Secrets*) that illustrates this widely held cultural understanding of prophetic speech and poetic speech. As he states, poets, like prophets, are in touch with primary sources of glory (*mabdaʿ-i fayāz*) and the subtle world (*ʿālam-i gāyab*). Poets and prophets are very close. In fact, only a mere integument separates the two since they "share a vision and are companions / as if on a single kernel, they are both layers." In an existence where "Life was hewn by the tip of a rose / Reflection was

433

chewed by the heart's teeth," to quote Nizami, the poet capable of uttering prophetic

speech does not cast himself into the mirror of literature. Instead all of reality must

bend to match the beauty of the ghazal's lyrical conventions (see Appendix P).

Revelation in the Mushaʿirah

In taking such definitive steps to ensure his legacy and to invoke the playfulness

of poetic creation in the openings to his works, Bedil is in many ways claiming his

prophethood or at least raising his status as having an ability to utter universal truths

as a prophet would, an idea that was widely held by the inheritors of Bedil's literary and

religious lineage. "My book of poems is open invitation for everyone. / Browse through

it, and of your fate, some consolation take," Bedil tells us according to Dargah Quli

Khan.

Yet, this was by no means a unique position for poets to adopt during this time

period. Homayra Ziad's dissertation on Mir Dard elucidates the popular idea of the link

between prophets and poets. Her reading of Mir Dard's *ʿIlm al-Kitāb* reveals the

codification of a popular conception that revelatory poetic speech is comparable to the

revealed utterances of prophets. Following the prophet, the poet "must by necessity

434

possess the power of inspirational, transformative speech ... as a seeker who ... channels the word of God into text, just as the Prophet Muhammad channeled the Qur'an" (Ziad 2008: 92). This idea is strikingly similar to Bedil's own claim as a mystic with revealed knowledge which he makes in his magnum opus *Chahār ʿUnsur,* a semi-autobiogrphic prosemetric work on the nature of reality. The quatrain seems to be making direct claims on this as well that Bedil's poetry-reciting followers were also keyed into. If these lines were being recited at every mushaʿirah when they began performing bibliomancy, it would seem that the gathering participants were acknowledging Bedil's role as a literary prophet. ʿUzlat plainly saw Bedil as such when he opened the book to such an appropriate verse.

The popular conception of poets being close to prophets, in a general way, further complicates our understanding of publicly mediated speech as we would find in the mushaʿirah. Namely, the larger late-Mughal public would have been very familiar with the ideas espoused by Mir Dard, Nizami, and Bedil—that poets are semi-prophetic social actors. In the age of saints, public poetry recitation taps into a complex aural and civil sphere for the circulation of poetic and religious ideas. C.A. Bayly partially alludes to this in his discussion of early 19th-century Indian society, citing the mushaʿirah and

the public religious debate as part of this public communicative collective (Bayly 1996).

Farhat Hasan finds that the pre-colonial Mughal public was "enduring if persistently

changing" where "sites of textuality were not only infused but deeply intwined with

the communicative processes through which social and political norms were instituted

and maintained" (Hasan 2005: 94). However, we need to combine historians' Marxist

conceptions of pre-colonial public India with the popular religious sphere instantiated

by a public living in the "age of saints" and documented in Persian and Urdu verse.

Habermas' textual mirrors and Bedil's gnostic looking glass need to be combined. Mir

Dard's writings on the links between poetic and prophetic speech acts show how modes

of proving divine worth were not used by kings alone. In fact, members of Delhi's public

space were intent on using mystical modes to acquire social capital. Mir Dard's

injunction that true verse can only be uttered by people with sufficiently high levels of

religious attainment was part of a wider social norm that influenced how poets viewed

themselves and how their followers understood their works, a quality Bedil himself

capitalized on and his disciples continued to revel in despite their master's death.

Muhammad Mustafa Sheftah (1804-1869) notes this Persian saying in his early

19th-century tazkirah *Gulshan-i Bekhār* (*The Thornless Rose Garden*):

بدان رتبهٔ شعر را سرسری
بود شاعری بعد پیغمبری

> Know that only by dint of verse's carelessness,
> Writing poetry comes after prophet hood.
> (Muhammad Mustafa Khan Sheftah 1998: 49)

In some ways this concept reformulates the anecdote from the Qurʾanic verse "Surat al-Shuʿara" or "The Poets" in which the Meccan poet-seers accuse the prophet of being a mere versifier (Shahîd 1983). As evidenced by the mushaʿirah, it was Bedil's verse that made him a prophet at one level, but it was the graveside mushaʿirah, an institution that allows for sagacious speech to be realized, where Bedil's poetic prophecies could go on living upon the tongues of his devotees.

5.2 Mapping Material Literary Histories

The material context and social role of early modern Indo-Persian recited literature makes embodiment between popular religious norms and literary norms quite evident. We return to Dargah Quli Khan's visit to Bedil's sepulcher in Delhi around 1740. Quli Khan noted that one of Mirza Bedil's more famous students Siraj al-Din ʿAli Khan-i Arzu was also in attendance at Bedil's ʿurs. In his tazkirah *Majmaʿ al-Nafāʾis,* Arzu notes that he served Bedil twice while he was in Delhi: once during the short reign of

437

the Mughal emperor Farrukh Siyar (r. 1713-1719) and again after Bedil's passing

through his devotion to the poet-saint's grave. Arzu wrote that since Bedil died the

people of India (*mardum-i hindustān*) "light candles on the day of his passing, give hot

food to the public" (*taʿam-i pukhtah bah khalāʾiq dahand*), and conduct a proper *ʿurs*,

complete with a pilgrimage at the tomb (*paiwastah ziyārat kardah mī shawad*) (Arzu 2004:

241). The hundreds of people that attended the event for lighting candles, listening to

the poetry, and the free food would also go there to buy potions that Bedil himself used

to concoct and sell out of his home.

Bedil had been orphaned as a child growing up in Patna in the eastern region of

North India and was reared by his maternal uncle Mirza Abad Allah Khan. His son,

Bedil's cousin Mirza Muhammad Saʾid, was appointed Bedil's successor in the days after

Bedil's death in 1721 and took proprietorship of the *dargāh* in the role of *sajjādah nashīn.*

Literally this means the one who sits on the prayer rug, but in the vocabulary of shrine

culture *sajjādah nashīn* refers to the hereditary administrators of a saint's tomb

(Khushgu 1959: 161). On the morning of the third day after Bedil's passing, Khushgu

presented a ghazal and a *rubāʿī* to Muhammad Saʾid (Khushgu 1959: 122) in which he

memorializes Bedil in florid language with images alluding to the *dāstān* or epic story

tradition. Unlike Dargah Quli Khan's reaction in 1740, Khushgu, who actually knew

Bedil and his coterie of disciples, had respect for Bedil's inheritors or at least enough

respect not to besmirch them as Dargah Quli Khan does. While Dargah Quli Khan

enjoyed that poetry recitation in 1739, he found it distasteful that Muhammad Saʾid was

attempting to earn some cash by selling snake-oil tinctures during the ʿurs:

> Muhammad Saʾid, [Bedil]'s cousin, who is ignorant in such a way that he
> knows nothing of the master's spiritual connection, keeps himself
> occupied (*dimāgh-i khud rā sozad*) with courtesy to *majlis* participants and
> managing the candle lighting. He spends time earning his livelihood
> through his fidelity to all the chemical-type tinctures and pills of the
> master's invention notorious through out Delhi. May his grave stay clean
> and may Heaven be his home. (Quli Khan 1993: 57)

Dargah Quli Khan also was careful to note the pharmaceutical market in front of the

Jamaʿ Masjid in Delhi known as Saʿd Allah Khan Chowk that specialized in tinctures and

snake oils for all matter of ailments (1999: 60). It is curious that Saʾid Muhammad as the

sajjādah nashīn would sell Bedil's snake oils during the ʿurs. Though no other chronicler

mentions the snake oils, Dargah Quli Khan found it detestable and records his views in

his travelogue. It should be noted that this was a habit of his in many other instances.

For our argument, the observation is a relevant one for it tells us how the recitational

realm of the mushaʿirah intersects with larger social practices. Even in the early

modern era, an *ʿurs* celebration and *ziyārat* or shrine pilgrimage were associated with sizable economic potential given the crowds of people they would draw and Dargah Quli Khan's travelogue makes this abundantly clear. Bedil was a holy figure for a few short decades before he became known only as a poet and his *ʿurs* drew crowds of people with a host of reasons for attending the event. It appears Bedil's graveside mushaʿirah was not an elite event after all and was part of Delhi's economy and material culture.

A Recitational Public Space

Arzu's use of the word *khalāʾiq* brings with it an important set of cultural connotations relevant to our understanding of the mushaʿirah as a type of Mughal public. In both the Urdu and Persian literary ecumenes, verse operated under the idea that it could be enjoyed by the elite and understood by the masses (*khāss-pasand wa ʿāmm-fahm*)—somewhat bridging the usual bifurcated social distinction between ideas of the commoners and the higher classes in Mughal society. For Kinra "a vision of normative social space pervades Indo-Persian poetry and the Sufi idiom generally as a foil" to the point where the speaker annihilates his civil identity (Kinra 2008: 208).

440

Initially, examining Sufi religious modalities as a lived portion of the Mughal habitus is the correct tack but Kinra's position still bifurcates the Sufi-istic realm from courtly society—somehow the "proper society" of the court, the sphere of good manners, social dressage, and restraint (Husain 1913; O'Hanlon 1999; Brown 2006), is at odds with drinking, being a *faqīr*, and spontaneous rhetorical combustion. In mushaʿirah anecdotes we've been examining through out this work, the courtly salon and the carnivalesque shrine are not opposed at all. In fact, they institutionalize the same ideal in a time with cults of personality around particular saints, poets, and performers who dwelled both above and below the ground as they were often held as paragons for contested forms social and religious virtue.

The ʿurs mushaʿirah at Bedil's grave taps into an important nexus point for our emerging understanding the Mughal public sphere vis-a-vis popular literary production and the personality cult at a time of religious and social transition. Clearly, the mushaʿirahs at Bedil's grave hosts both the lettered elite and the commoners of Delhi society where the recited poetry would probably be understood and enjoyed by all who attended—even illiterate people. Matthew Innes demonstrates some of the dangerous binaries set up between "written-church-religious" and "oral-secular-

unreligious" binaries in "literacy aware" societies where oral and written traditions seem to exist in concert with each other (Bayly 1996; Innes 1998). The context for reciting poetry at the ʿurs mushaʿirah makes this quite clear. That is, we have to reevaluate the boundaries between religious, literary, and public conceptions of early modern India by understanding how the ʿurs celebration within shrine environment was ripe for a variety of public interpretive modes that converge in late Mughal culture. Some people were there for spiritual intercession or *tawassūl*, lighting lamps and stringing rose garlands on Bedil's grave; others came to buy the tinctures Bedil had made in his lifetime; and other Delhites came for the *langar* or donation of prepared food. Of course, some came for the verse, to recite it and to hear it.

Poets were part of that *khalāʾiq* or common mass of people that would attend these heterogenous public gatherings. Many of the mushaʿirah examined in this work were semi-public affairs in private apartments or courtyards of the elite who patronized them. Opposite the private mushaʿirah we have the bazaar where popular anecdotes present the image that people would be singing verse in the streets (see Introduction above). The ʿurs mushaʿirah is unique as a public realm for poetry recitation in that it sits between the market and the salon and could contain a larger

442

variety of people there to hear verse, ask for Bedil's intercession, and buy some of that famous snake-oil.

The public nature of Bedil's ʿurs mushaʿirah is evident for Dargah Quli Khan lists Bedil's grave and festivities in the context of other saintly shrines and celebrations. Yet, reciting poetry at an ʿurs or in the space of a shrine was something familiar for participants in Delhi's public sphere at the time. For instance, Mir Taqi Mir (1723-1810) was called by his friends to attend the ʿurs at the Sayyid Hasan Rasul Numa shrine in Delhi in the early 1740s.[168] He saw Persian poet Qizilbash Khan Ummid (1668-1746) from across the crowd and Ummid announced to him, "Listen, I've been composing a few Urdu verses these days!" (see Appendix Q).

The examples above chart an everyday geography of mushaʿirah-based social interactions among poets. Or more simply, they show how for 1700s society in North India and Iran exchanging verse with people has an everyday quality to it. When conceiving the everydayness of literary interchange we ought to keep two things in mind. Persophone literary criticism is very interested in the idea of everyday speech or *rozmarrah* and the mushaʿirah is a way to normalize heightened speech patterns and

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[168] Shah Mubarak Abru who died in 1733-4 was buried near the Rasul Numa shrine (Khushgu 1959: 196)

mystical ideas into an oral setting. Debates in 18th-century India between people like Hazin and Arzu focused on how a populace in India that may or may not have used Persian in day-to-day interchanges could suitably capture idiomatic Persian speech in literature given this disconnect from the so-called native context of Persian literature. In the tazkirahs, Urdu and Persian mushaʿirah anecdotes are narrated in Persian in part because Persian was the language for prose, but given the level of joking and delight that accompany such depictions—that is linguistically the jokes work best in Persian—I think we can assume Persian's everydayness was entirely applicable to the multilingual quality of 18th-century Indian society in urban centers. We can also cite Bedil's grave again in this argument: a variety of people with varying intentions attended the ʿurs where they undoubtably heard poets reciting and singing Persian verse, often too loudly at times according to our writers. On this note, there were perhaps illiterate poets there whose verse did not make it into the tazkirah anecdotes we have today.

We can also make a second point on the *rozmarrah* in the context of the mushaʿirah anecdote. Following Stefano Pellò's article, tazkirah chroniclers were intent on capturing an everyday sensibility about their local literary communities, refocusing the fixed and minute ideas about the Persian literary canon and its circulation into the

444

realm of day-to-day speech—at this point we should also remember Kinra's extended footnote on the Persophone idea of *khāss-pasand wa ʿāmm-fahm* or enjoyed by the elite and understood by commoners (2008: 208). The tazkirah captures a poetry on the street and we can see how in these instances the mushaʿirah functions as something improvised but clearly demarcated in the social imagination of Mughal society. Benedict Anderson's idea of a "fixed cosmopolitanism," tells us that the tazkirah is a textual window into the open-air context of oral poetry recitation; it brings us to the literature of the street, to use Pellò's interpretation of the tazkirah (Foo 2008). In turn, such an approach widens the definition of the mushaʿirah beyond the hackneyed image of the poets' circle and the revolving candle that Farhat Allah Beg casts for us in his last mushaʿirah in Delhi and picked up by Bollywood Muslim social dramas. Public poetry recitation was more fluid than the narration popular and now instantiated tellings depict. The ʿurs, the shrine, the coffeehouse, and the street itself all form important sites for semi-formal or institutionalized poetry recitation.

Dargah Quli Khan writes with the most detail on how poets and devotees conducted themselves in Bedil's posthumous mushaʿirah. Inaugurating the event, Bedil's former students and the appropriate classes of Delhi (*talāmazah-ish o mauzūnān-i shahar*) arrange themselves around the grave in a gathering circle (*daur-i qabr halqah-i majlis tartīb mī dahand*), read from an autograph copy of Bedil's complete works that they passed around (*kullīyāt-ish keh bah khat-i grāmī murratibat-i tarqīm yāftah ba-īn halqah guzashtah iftatah bah shaʿr khwānī mī numāyand*), and, "by merit of rank, they entertain[ed] the gathering with the rewards of their [poetic] thoughts" (*ʿala qadr-i murātib natāʾj-i afkār-i khud rā naql-i majlis mī sāzand*). As a result, "a novel delight is had and a unique mirth enjoins among those present" (*halawat-i turfah bah hasūl mī pīwānd wa anbisāt-i khāsi bah huzār iyād mī gardad*) (1999: 56).

Using the autograph manuscript of Bedil's collected poems makes for an interesting method to inaugurate the event. Bindraban Das Khushgu noted that in 1725 Muhammad ʿAta Allah ʿAta (d. 1726 CE) a poet predisposed toward sarcasm and jokes was one of the readers from the collected works. ʿAta was another entertaining presence in the mushaʿirah scene in Delhi with his charming behavior that would take

446

peoples heads off (*harkāt basyār namkīn az ū sar mī zad wa zīnat-i majlis-hā bud*). As one of

Bedil's students, ʿAta's witty displays in gatherings caused Bedil to find him worthy

enough to allow ʿAta to satirize him. In turn, Bedil recorded some of ʿAta's verses in his

diary. ʿAta thanked him in a quatrain:

بیدل شهٔ اقلیم کلام و هر فن
از گوشهٔ چشم دل نظر داشت به من
از روی عنایتی قلمدان و بیاض
فرمود مرا وزارت ملک سخن

Oh Bedil, lord of the world of poetry and every art.
From the recesses of your heart's eye, glance upon me.
And with the favored pen box and diary,
Give me a governorship in the domains of speech.

Rather than quoting his satire on Bedil's realm of authority, quoting a chronogram, Ata

says, "This is the miracle that I have said once already in the grandeur of the Creator:

ʿAbd al-Qadir Bedil left.'" By the *abjad* system the chronogram reads " عبدالقادر بیدل رفت "

which adds up to 1138 AH (1725), five years after Bedil died. I take it to refer to the year

of that particular poetry gathering where poets would remember the poet-saint's

passing. Khushgu brings it up in a matter-of-fact tone that for the poets of Delhi it was

assumed that there would be a gathering on the day of Bedil's death anniversary.

Additionally, he notes that when Muhammad ʿAta Allah passed away a year later "a

447

light in the gathering for Bedil's death anniversary dissolved" (*az wafātish raunaq-i majmuʿah-i ʿurs mirzā barham khorad*) (Khushgu 1959: 150).

Around that same time, the Persian poet Mir Afzal Sabit (d. 1739)—the same Sabit whose verse Hazin called into question—presented a verse at Bedil's graveside gathering that echoes this image of the candle burning and being snuffed out that almost eulogizes ʿAta's passing. At Bedil's ʿurs, Sabit read from a *marsīyah* to Husain ibn ʿAli, the prophet Muhammad's grandson and the paradigmatic martyr in Shiʿi Islam. His first couplet:

<div dir="rtl">
امام را که براه هدایت است چراغ

چو شمع سرخ روان گشت جوئی خون ز دماغ
</div>

> The Imam who is a lamp on the path of salvation
> Like a red candle, a stream of blood flowed from the brain

After he read he stated, "If one of my poems might have seemed careless in your view, please cross it out from the manuscript" (Khushgu 1959: 223).

Recorded a decade later around the time of Nadir Shah's invasion, Dargah Quli Khan tells us that after Bedil's works go around the circle the poets begin introducing some of their own poems. Bedil's former student and owner of his former teacher's sword and staff, Maʿni Yab Khan (d. 1744) kept the mushaʿirah lively and usually

448

inaugurated the second phase of original poetry recitation.[169] Dargah Quli Khan was particularly adamant about the rule of comportment in the gathering (*ba tadrīj maswsat-i ashʿār-i khud rā bah ʿazra awardah and ʿala qadr-i muratib natāʾij-i afkār-i khud rā naql-i majlis mī sāzand*), and so he is careful to note that Maʿni Yab Khan began this phase of the ʿurs gathering during which he read this ghazal:

<div dir="rtl">

به گلشن چشم شهلایت چو می آشام می گردد
دکان حسن خوبان تخته چون بادام می گردد

</div>

> Your dark eye like that of a wine drinker roams in the garden.
> The storefront of the fair ones' beauty is closing up like an almond.

In a strange verse, Maʿni Yab Khan is perhaps revealing why he earned his title. The eye descending into the garden is half opened and looks like a storefront about to be closed up with boards over the windows. Additionally, he is playing with the word *khūbān* or *khūbānī* which is also the name for a dried apricot stuffed with an almond or *bādām*. This particular sweet looks like a half-opened eye. Of course, the almond is often indexical for the Beloved's eye.

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[169] Maʿni Yab Khan was patronized by the crown and kept in contact with many of Delhi's literati. Khushgu was close with him and memorialized his death in his tazkirah, stating, "Maʿni Yab Khan passed away while he was having sexual intercourse (*dar halat-i jamaʿ*), most probably because he used to eat very little food. God be praised, what an enjoyable way of dying! This is, in any case, quite an uncanny circumstance, which took place in the year 1157 [1744-5]" (Khushgu 1959: 244; trans. Pellò 2009).

A young poet named Mirza Abu al-Hasan Agah (c. 1740s) was another reader of

Bedil's *dīwān* at the graveside gathering. Dargah Quli Khan heard him recite this ghazal:

غم و درد تو از آن روز که مهربان من است
دل نمک سود کباب است که برخوان من است

Since the day that I have been a guest of your pain and sadness,
My heart is a salt-rubbed kabob that sits on my table.

While he was alive, Bedil was friendly with a Hindu poet who was a former-

prostitute (*kanchinī*) named Babri Rindi who was also apparently his student. People

generally called her "Bhawari" and though she no longer took clients as sexual

partners, at least Hindi seems to imply this, she was still incomparable in singing and

dancing. She would meet with Bedil and compose verses (1958: 90-91; see Appendix R).

It appears Babri Rindi was not as "high-class" as the courtesans discussed later

by Mir Hasan and Mus'hafi in their tazkirahs above. Hindi uses the word *kanchinī,* a

term usually reserved for Hindu temple dancers or *devadāsī* who were often public

sexual figures for a given temple's religious elite. Perhaps in a gesture to preserve

Bedil's honor, he also announces that Bhawari ended her promiscuity. In Hindi's

estimation, it's as through the association with Bedil's Sufi spirit and the cultivation of

Persian aesthetic sensibilities that seems to raise Bhawari's status. What's curious is

450

how did a low status prostitute learn Persian? At least, in the hierarchical view of

Persian as an elite language in contemporary scholarship it would seem that

Persophone sociability would be outside of Babri Rindi's sphere. That a low status,

Hindu prostitute had the poetic acumen to be associated with Bedil is significant in that

it alters our current understanding of the linguistic and social hierarchies associated

with the Persophone literary sphere in the 18th century. Additionally, she could have

been one of the attendees at Bedil's ʿurs. None of the recorded anecdotes note women

being there, but we know from Dargah Quli Khan's *Muraqqaʿ* that courtesans attended

ʿurs events as performers. Babri Rindi's compositions point to the possibility of there

being a popular sphere for Persian literature and Bedil's grave hosted an aspect of this

discursive context.

One of the most important reciters at Bedil's grave was its patron, Siraj al-Din

ʿAli Khan-i Arzu who had been a former disciple of the poet-saint and adopted his

teacher's students when he passed away. Quli Khan praises Khan-i Arzu's colorful

rhetorical abilities (*rangīnī guftgū-ish*) thusly: "the spring of his day-to-day [speech]

makes a meadow of the environs of the *bazm* (gathering)" (*bahār-e rozmarrah-ish fiza-yi*

bazm rā chamistān), and he writes that Khan-i Arzu himself is the "advancement of the

451

anjuman (consortium) of gentlemen and the light and the vision of the *mahfil* (party) of appraisers of witticisms," (*farogh-i anjuman-i mawzūnān ast wa chasm-o chirāgh-i mahfil-i nuktah sanjān*); and additionally Quli Khan relates that when Khan-i Arzu "arrived at a colorfully cast *mahfil* calls of 'welcome' pierce the air" (*bah mahfilī kah rang afroz gasht sadā-yi marhabah bah hawā mī paichīd*) (1993: 80-81). Continuing, "On the day of the ʿurs of the late Mirza Bedil he adorned the poetry reading in connection with his discipleship [to the master] and the gracious consoler turns the world with his perfect collection of [literary] ideas. This first line from a lyric [of his], through its adornment of this bouquet of remembrance, is illuminated in writing below."

زبس بردند با خود در لحد بم رنج مخموری
سزد لوح مزار میکشان از یشم انگوری

    To the extent that they drink themselves sick in the grave,
    The headstones of wine drinkers are worthy of grape-jasper.

At a time when other poets would be memorializing the poet-saint, Khan-i Arzu directly eulogizes his late ustad by turning the stone marker of his grave into a sponge soaking up the blood-colored wine Bedil as the paradigmatic Lover drinks in the grave.

    It was probable that our traveling poet and mystic ʿUzlat was at the ʿurs when Arzu recited the above lines. He had gone to Delhi to meet with the poet and thinker at

452

the same time Quli Khan recorded Arzu's recitation. Also, the chronicler and poet

Hakim Lahori saw ʿUzlat several times at Arzu's home for poetry recitation. As Mir Taqi

Mir tells us, Arzu had hosted literary events at his home for many years but

unfortunately, perhaps Khan-i Arzu did not find ʿUzlat's recited verses worthy to note

down (*bayāzī*) or they were cut in the final editorial process when Arzu was assembling

his tazkirah *Majmaʿ al-Nafāʾis*.[170]

Yet, the verse that ʿUzlat picked through bibliomancy appears intertextually

linked with Arzu's recitation. In fact, it almost reads as an answer where Bedil casts

himself as the paradigmatic Lover. We return to anecdote when ʿUzlat was at the foot of

Bedil's grave and found this line through bibliomancy:

<div dir="rtl">

چه مقدار خون در عدم خورده باشم
که بر خاکم آئی و   من مرده باشم

</div>

However afflicted I have been in death,[171]
You come upon my dust and I must have died.

---

[170] It is interesting to note ʿUzlat's development of the Lover-in-the-grave theme his Urdu and Persian
poetry:

At the apocalypse, the wine drinker will arise immediately saying,
"Where is the wine? Where is goblet and where is the glass?"

<div dir="rtl">

حشر میں قبر سے کہتا ہی اٹھیےگا مے کش
کہاں مے ہے کہاں جام ہے کہاں ہے شیشہ

</div>

Who in this world could be such a glutton for punishment like me?
It's my blood that's capable of coloring the tulip

<div dir="rtl">

کسی در جهان چو من نبود دائم العذاب
خونم به رنگ لاله بود داغ کردنی

</div>

[171] Literally, "What ever amount of blood I have eaten in death." (ʿAbd al-Wali ʿUzlat 1962)

453

As the dead Lover lies in his grave waiting for the Beloved and/or the Day of

Reckoning—it does not really matter which comes first since the Beloved is an

apocalypse in and of himself—he hopes for the Beloved and drinks the whole time. That

is, he is suffering and drinking blood-colored wine which could actually be his own

blood. The Lover drinks so much to begin with even his blood is intoxicating. In turn,

the earth of the grave becomes sodden with this blood-red wine turning Khan-i Arzu's

line into a statement to which Bedil's verse through ʿUzlat responds. Bedil's speaker has

been sustaining himself through drinking his own blood in the grave as well when

ʿUzlat recites the verse through bibliomancy as a deferred eulogy to the poet-saint. It is

as if the Lover in the grave says, "As you can see I've been drinking a lot, but I'm still not

satisfied and I'm still dead." At this point, the ideal lover's headstone morphs into a

precious material, grape agate or blood jasper (*yasham-i angūrī*), colored red by Lover's

wine/blood oozing in the grave.

A Map of Dead Lovers' Graves

With Bedil's graveside musha'irah, the poets of Delhi were directly tapping into a widely practiced social lexicon on graves, poets, and saints found in the Persophone world. In the case of Arzu's poem and his Bedil's response from the grave, the verses appear to be intertextually mapping by marking the former ustad's grave at the tomb of the ideal Lover. The graves of socially revered personalities formed an ecumenical aspect in popular Islam in Medieval and early modern times. For an urban, Persian-educated populace, graveside recitation taps into lineages of religious belonging and embodied literary social practices (Burton-Page 1986; Tavakoli-Targhi 2001b; Halevi 2007; Millie 2008; Mehrdad Amanat 2012; Sharma 2012). Famously, Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi exerted his readers to read poems at his grave:

بر سر تربت ما چون گذری همت خواه

که زیارتگه رندان جهان خواهد بود

Thus come to the head of my grave and say a blessing
For it will be a pilgrimage site for the drunkards of the world

At saints' shrines, attendees would recite the deceased's ancestral lineage (*silsilah*) and to this day devotees and poets in South Asia maintain the *manqabatī mushā'irah* (benedictory gathering) to mark the anniversary of saints' passings where

455

poets gather to read verse praising the saint. As we've seen, the shrine is highly conducive to recited verse. If we remember from the previous chapter, the *khayāl* singer, instrumentalist, and paradigmatic Lover Niʿmat Khan (d. 1746) would hold a large gathering (*majmuʿah-i ʿāzim*) at the grave of his teacher Shah Gulshan who died January 3, 1728[172] and was buried in the land belonging to Muhammad Nasir ʿAndalib (Dard's father) in Shah Ganj just outside the main walled city of Delhi (Khushgu 1959:168; 2010: 598).[173] In addition to the musical gatherings poets, would recite at Gulshan's ʿurs as well. Mir Musharraf's ʿurs also hosted memorable poetry gatherings during the early 18th-century when the outlandish Kashmiri poet Garami (d. 1743) who dressed up like a Hindu holy man would gather his students to hold a recite in a portico off to the side (Quli Khan 1994: 84). As will be discussed below, people made pilgrimages to the graves of Muhammad ʿAli Hazin (1692-1766) and Nasir ʿAli Sirhindi (d. 1697) explicitly to recite poetry over them.

At this point the reader should revisit the opening *rubāʿī* Dargah Quli Khan heard from Bedil's complete works kept at his tomb to compare it with Hafiz's request:

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[172] (21 Jamada al Awal 1140 AH)

[173] Bindraban Das Khushgu regularly attended the event and noted Kashmiri poet Muhammad Masʿud Rafaʿ was also there and noted that Rafaʿ recited well (Khushgu 1959: 167).

<div dir="rtl">

ای آینه طبع تو ارشاد پذیر

در کسب فواید نمائی تقصیر

مجموعهٔ فکر ما صلای عام است

سیری کن و قسمت تسلی برگیر

</div>

You with the mirror-like nature, this command take:
In harlotry conspicuous piety is a mistake.
My book of poems is a call to prayer for all.
Peruse it and of your fate consolation take.

As if prophesying the role of his literary contribution, Bedil exhorted his readers and listeners to use his *kulliyāt* or complete works for the purpose of bibliomancy much in the way Hafiz Shirazi urged his readers to confront their lives through the guiding intervention of verse by coming to the foot of his grave. Bedil's quatrain points to the social or communal benefit (*salā-yi ʿāmm*) for the common listener or reader as they glean meaning from poets' works. Readers and listeners must move beyond the moment of sensual perception and rational understanding, exemplified by the mirror of the subject's present state (*āʾīnah-i kaifīyat*), and understand verse at the gnostic level, as realized in the mirror of the heart or inner nature (*āʾīnah-tabaʿ*). Of course, God Himself is said to be *āʾīnah-tabaʿ* or "mirror-natured." During lyrical perception reflected through a moment of transcendental self-awareness, Bedil's readers and listeners better understand and console their fate (*qismat tasallī bar-giraftan*).

457

The tradition of reciting verses at the graves of saints and poets—in many ways they are often one and the same—has its roots in the shrine traditions of greater Iran and South Asia. Saʿdi and Hafiz's graves (*Saʿdiyah* and *Hafiziyah*) continue to be pilgrimage destinations and Dargah Quli Khan's depiction of Bedil's ʿurs exemplifies this Persophone tendency as well, though few today visit his supposed grave and some have claimed Bedil's remains were taken to Afghanistan (Khalil 1950). Knowing how important Bedil's grave was in the context of the Persian cosmopolis's tradition of venerating poet-saints, could this have been a *Bediliyah*? The early Urdu poet Shakir Naji (1690?-1744) alludes to this practices of reciting at poets' graves in a poem referencing Wali Muhammad Wali (1662-1707/8), if we remember from Chapter Two, Bedil and Wali were linked through verse and popular conceptions of Delhi's literary sphere in the very early 1700s. The writer's pen name itself means "saint" and his grave was revered in Ahmadabad, Gujarat until it was destroyed in 2002 during then chief minister Narendra Modi's anti-Muslim pogroms. Naji exclaims:

<div dir="rtl">

جو قبرستان میں کوئی شعر ناجی کا پڑھے جا کر
کفن کو چاک کر کر آفریں کہتا ولی نکلے

</div>

Were someone to go and recite one of Naji's verses in the graveyard,
Tearing his shroud, Wali would pop out and say, "Bravo!"
(Muhammad Shakir Naji 1989: 349)

When a speaker comes to recite over a given poet, saint, or prophet's bones, they aim to legitimate their own recitation through a deferred mushaʿirah. That is, they are able to exchange verse with a poetry master even after he has died. Bedil's ʿurs was a recitation and spatial chronotope for emergent and local conceptions of literary history every year between 1720 and 1760 or so. Yet, as a node in a network of poets' tombs stretch over India, Iran, Central Asia the tomb also charts a spatial conception of the Persophone cosmopolis which connects vernacular practices with the the former elite realms of Persian literary culture. From a socio-cultural point of view, as Bedil's ʿurs was a yearly event, poets across South Asia conceived of it as a useful and reliable gathering point to make connections and present new compositions at time when Delhi was still the center of Persian literary production and circulation. Like Shakir Naji, the poets wanted their poet-saint Bedil to rise from his grave and shout, "Bravo!" But this was not just a gathering of poets reading verse at the grave, as Bindraban Das Khushgu notes, hundreds of listeners would come, in addition to the wider audience of pilgrims and *faqīrs* who came to ask for religious intercession, to eat some of the donated food, and to purchase Bedil's snake oils.

Bedil's ʿurs mushaʿirah complicates our notions of late-Mughal literary,

religious, and social sphere in the way it brings together usually disparate aspects of

India's pre-colonial ecumene. Following the opening *rubāʿī*, it appears the "people of

Hindustan" took Bedil's words quite literally, using the works to "console their fate"

and populating the tomb compound as a stage to present verse. While, the ʿurs

mushaʿirah was one of many recitational events happening in Delhi over the 1700s—

and we shall discuss some of the others shortly, the regularity with which chroniclers

depicted and referenced Bedil's ʿurs reveals the mushaʿirah's larger social and material

importance.

The presence of Bedil's complete works at the graveside for recitation and

bibliomancy enhances our argument on the materiality of early modern literary culture

and socio-cultural realms the mushaʿirah inhabits. There are several legends about

Hafiz and Saʿdi's graves in the tazkirah tradition and the oral histories that accompany

these poets' verses. Shad Azimabadi in his biography of his ustad Ulfat Husain Faryad,

Hayāt-i Faryād, brings up one. According to him, when Iran's first Safavid ruler Shah

Ismail (r. 1501-1524) came to Shiraz he wanted to destroy Hafiz and Saʿdi's tombs.

Arguing in favor of shrine worship and its importance to the larger public in Iran, Shad

presents an anecdote where in defense of both tombs, *tafāl* or bibliomancy was performed at the graves and they arrived at these verses. From Saʿdi's works they divined this couplet:

<div dir="rtl">

الهی بحق بنی فاطمه
که بر قول ایمان کنی خاتمه

</div>

Oh God, for the sake of the progeny of Fatimah
—thus you conclude at your declaration of faith.
(Sayyid ʿAli Muhammad Shad Azimabadi 1927: 149)

And from Hafiz's *dīwān* they reached these lines:

<div dir="rtl">

جوزا سحر نهاد حمایل برابرم
یعنی غلام شاهم و سوگند می خورم

</div>

Gemini divines the talisman before me:
In other words, I am a slave to the king and I swear it.
(Ibid.: 150).

The first poem invokes the Shiʿi concept regarding the Prophet's family's earthly divinity by alluding to his daughter Fatimah who married his cousin ʿAli and thus began the Shiʿi line of sovereign religious authority. This bibliomantic intervention satisfied Shah Ismail's religious inclinations, after all Saʿdi was not alive during Iran's conversion to the Imami sect. The Gemini or two-headed symbol from near eastern astrology was an important aspect of divine sovereignty under the Safavid cult and the bibliomancy through his *dīwān* allowed Hafiz to posthumously swear his allegiance to the Safavid

461

king. The patronage of a sheikh, living or dead, was very important to emperors during the age of saints.

Tahir Nasrabadi, writing in the seventeenth century, tells us when the poet Mirza Nizam Shirazi died in 1630 and his body was brought for burial in the *Hafiziyah* which the managing authority forbid presumably on religious grounds. The matter was settled through bibliomancy when they arrived at this verse:

<div dir="rtl">

رواق منظر چشم من آشیانهٔ تست
کرم نما و فرود آکه خانه خانهٔ تست

</div>

 You dwell in my eye's view of the portico.
 Show compassion and come down for the house is your house

According to Tahir Nasrabadi, the above verse had the same notoriety when poet Mulla Ahli (1460-1536) was buried in the Hafiziyah compound (2000: 383-4). Ahli's reasons for wanting to be buried next to Hafiz are written on his tombstone:

<div dir="rtl">

جایم به روز واقعه پهلوی او کنید
او قبلهٔ من است و رخم سوی وا کنید

</div>

 On the day you place me next to him,
 Turn my face toward him for he is my *qiblah.*

Tazkirah writers record the poets Saʿd Gul Shirazi, Talib Hajari, and Nizam Dast Gaʾib Shirazi being buried next to Hafiz's grave. It seems they all venerated Hafiz to the point of wanting to be joined with him in the same earth.

462

The idea of joining a poet saint in death or reciting at his grave was not a foreign idea to India during this the 1700s and the network of poet-saints graves was not bound to one region, but materialized a map of the Persian-language cosmopolis as it stretched from Istanbul to Calcutta. Additionally, bibliomancy or *tafāl* was a widely practiced form of divination that created another material route to ancillary textual practices (Gruber 2011). In the context of Bedil's grave and the graves of other poet-saints, bibliomancy provides a lyrical map of the Persian cosmopolis. Tazkirah writers were well familiar with the anecdotes listed above since they too read Nasrabadi's work and commented on it depth in some case. Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi tells us in *ʿIqd-i Suraiyā* that Mir Dard's famous mushaʿirahs and Sufi gatherings could heal believers. One of Dard's Kashmiri students, a Sunni nobleman named Mirza Khan Beg Sami, took a pledge to Dard's Sufi order and requested to be buried in Dard's tomb outside of Delhi's Turkman Gate (Mus'hafi 2007: 50-51). In part, the cult of personality associated with poets' graves and the act of performing bibliomancy next to them or reciting verse taps into conceptions about the relationship between the *ustād* or teacher and *shāgird* or disciple.

Muhammad Husain Naziri Nishapuri (d. 1612?) had been associated with the Mughal court during Jahangir's reign, but ended up retiring to Ahmadabad as a landowner where he continued writing on a freelance basis (Losensky 2004). One of his poems explores this concept of graveside saint veneration:

یکی به گور عزیزان شهر سیری کن
ببین که نقش املها چه باطل افتاده است

    Take a tour of the tombs of the city's respected men,
    Now see how the map of desires becomes useless.

As if taking his teacher's statement to heart, the local poet Sawadi Gujarati sat at Naziri's grave until he too passed away in 1622 (Walih 2008: 1005). The poet-prophet or poet-saint sees himself within the Lover's world being continually estranged from the object of his desire. The ambivalence of this relationship clearly permeates the social standing between poets themselves and the larger public familiar with Persian-based literary tropes. Accomplished poets are paradigmatic Lovers who continually martyr themselves in the fruitless attempt to attain the Beloved.

A poet from Kashan in present day Iran named ʿAli Tajalli (d. 1610) came to Ahmadabad, Gujarat in 1605 after serving as a soldier of fortune in the Mughal emperor Jahangir's army and engaged Naziri in a series of literary debates (*bā moulānah nazīrī*

mushā‘rah dast) apparently with the aim of gaining his tutelage (Losensky 2004). We could read one of Tajalli's poems as a thematic rejoinder to Naziri's compelling pilgrimage of Lovers' tombs:

بر مزار ما شهیدان نی چراغی نی گلی
هر طرف پروانه بر طوفست و هر سو بلبلی

On the grave of our martyrs [you'll find] neither a candle nor a flower
The moth circles all around and at every side there is a song bird.[174]

Tajalli's ghazal is appropriate for our discussion of poets and listeners congregating around the graves of literary saints. The above ghazal reconfigures the Lover as the *insān al-kāmil* or perfect man for other Lovers. Once the Perfect Lover, or in our case the poet-saint, has died he becomes the flame around which moths burn their wings and nightingales sing. Tajalli's verse is the perfect interpretive rejoinder to conceptualize our discussion of Bedil's *‘urs* musha‘irah where Delhi's poets and others were lighting candles on Bedil's gravestone and singing their poems.

Muhammad ‘Ali Hazin Lahiji (1692-1766) retired to Benares where he continued seeing disciples, writing religious tracts for the Awadh region's Shi‘i community, and

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[174] This sentiment and rhyme are echoed in a different tone in Nur Jahan Makhfi's verse:

بر مزار ما غریبان نی چراغی نی گلی
نی پر پروانه سوزد نی صدای بلبلی

On the grave's of our paupers there is not a candle or a rose,
The moth's wing isn't burned and the nightingale doesn't cry.

set up a headstone and grave plot for himself.[175] Writing in 1785, Mus'hafi tells us Hazin would spend his days sitting at his own grave in the years before his passing (2007: 34).

Bhagwan Das Hindi left a small chronicle, *Safinah-i Hindī* (c. 1804), recorded during his time as a revenue administrator for the ruler of Awadh Asaf al-Daulah (r. 1775-1797) while headquartered in Lucknow. During his friend Rai Sarab Sukh Divanah's funeral arrangements in Benares in June of 1789, Hindi made a pilgrimage to Hazin's grave where he found the epitaph etched on the headstone pleasing enough to record in his notebook, memorializing the event in his tazkirah:

روشن شد از وصال تو شبهای تار من
صبح قیامت است چراغ مزار من

The darkness of my nights became radiant from union with you.
The candle of my tomb is the morning of the Apocalypse.

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[175] An interesting verse cited in the *Nashtar-i ʿIshq* seems to put some sympathetic words for India into Hazin's mouth and forms an interesting response to Hafiz's line "for it will be a pilgrimage site for the drunkards of the world" (*keh ziyāratgāh-i rindān-i jahān khwāhid bud*):

I will not leave Benares for this is the world's pilgrimage destination   از بنارس نروم معبد عام است اینجا
Every Brahman is a child of a Laxshman and Ram here. (ʿAshiqi 2012: 489)   هر برهمن بچهای لچمن و رام است اینجا

Like Naziri, Hafiz, and Bedil, Hazin positions his grave as the light around which other

poets congregate to read their verses.[176] A *rubāʿī*, also recorded in his compound and

noted by Hindi, make this point clearer still:

زبان دان محبت بودہام دیگر نمی دانم
همی دانم که گوش از دوست پیغامی شنید اینجا
حزین از پای ره پیما بسی سرگشتگی دیدم
سر شوریده بربالین آسایش رسید اینجا

> I have spoken the language of love and nothing else
> I only know this much: the ear heard a message from a friend in this place
> Oh Hazin I saw many wonders in these traveler's shoes
> My frenzied head quietly rests on a pillow here

Hindi too casts Hazin as his spiritual literary teacher into the role of a perfect Lover

who spoke the language of universal Sufistic love (*zabān dān-i muhobbat*) and lived his

life with in a suitably troubled state (*sar-i shorīdah*). Hindi perhaps saw a trip to Benares

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[176] The veneration of students is also part of this lineage as well. When his student Roshan al-Daulah, a smalltime Mughal nobleman with an interest in Sufism, walked south from the walled city of Delhi to the tomb of Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki for the ʿurs, Shah Wali Allah Ishtiaq is said to have uttered this poem:

ایسا مرید کیوں نہ دو عالم کو نسترے
پیروں کی راہ میں جو کروروں دیا کرے

> Why is it that such disciples not be liberated to the heaven and earth?
> Who would light their teachers' paths with thousands of candles? (Hasan 1940: 39).

Qaʾim Chandpuri also spent time with Wali Allah and found him to be personable and eloquent (Makhzan 45). According Bindraban Das Khushgu Wali Allah regularly held poets' gatherings at his home and showed great deference to this coterie of people (*ba-īn firqah khelī salūk-i ādmīʾānah mī namūd*). At one mushaʿirah, Shah Wali Allah even wrote down some verse into Khushgu's diary (1959: 211).

accomplishing a literary and religious pilgrimage on several levels. Benares or Varanasi

is the most important pilgrimage destination for Hindus and Hazin's burial place next

to the Ganges further enhances the destination's cultural draw for a Persian educated

Hindu man of letters like Bhagwan Das Hindi. A year later the poet Mir Muhammad

Husain Awadhi (d. October 5, 1790), who would often spend time with Hazin, was buried

in the same compound (Nashtar 2012: 401).

The poet whose funeral arrangements Bhagwan Das Hindi was seeing to in

Benares was Rai Sarab Sukh Divanah (d. June 13, 1789) a Persian poet with several

dīwāns in Urdu and Persian and who would had a group of students in Lucknow. Divanah

was originally from Punjab and grew up in Lahore before settling in Delhi where he

associated with Sufi masters like Mir Dard (1721-1785) before emigrating to Lucknow in

1784-5. Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi also met Divanah there in the mushaʿirahs and Sufi

gatherings he would attend where Divanah would recite his romantic poems in a loud

voice. Though Mir Dard decided not to move to Lucknow, Delhi was losing large

numbers of its cultural elite to Lucknow which became home to Sufi and poetic

gatherings hosted by religious and literary personalities.[177] During his time there, Hindi attended these events regularly and is careful to note that Divanah hosted both poetic and Sufi gatherings at his house where he graciously entertained his guests (*majlis-i fuqurā wa majamuʿah-i shuʿarā aksar ba-khānah-ish mī shud basyār saluk wa modarah ba-ahl-i mahfil mī nāmud*) (Hindi 1958: 62). After about four years in Lucknow, Divanah fell sick. He said to Hindi, "After I die it will be necessary to keep Gaya in mind." Divanah was referring to Bodhgaya, a city revered by Hindus and Buddhists alike, where after his death Hindi would be responsible escorting Divanah's widow who would perform her husband's death rites. The day Divanah told this to Hindi, he set off for Benares where he finally passed away, where his body was cremated, and where his ashes scattered in the Ganges. Hindi relates the particulars of Divanah's funeral rites and passing in rather Sufistic terms. For Hindi, Divanah cremation and scattering his ashes has the same meaning as being drowned in the ocean of mercy (*ghareq-i bahr-i rahmat hamīn maʿnī dārad*) (see Pellò 2014a).

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[177] Another important mushaʿirah and Sufi personality in Lucknow during the late 18th century was Khwajah Basit, the son of a mystic who had converted from Sunni Islam to Shiʿism. Basit was discussed in the chapters above.

5.3 Imitation and Debate

Part of becoming a poet involves learning the craft at the feet of an

accomplished teacher. Tazkirahs quote many instances where a student or poet seeking

patronage would travel to a literary center or a particular poet's home for instruction.

As Frances Pritchett and others have noted, the musha'irah space was conceived as an

arena for crafting verse and receiving instruction from the ustad. Reciting verse at the

grave highlights this further.

Prior to his passing in 1727, Shah Gulshan was a regular attendee at the 'urs

musha'irah. A Kashmiri merchant named Ma'imanat Khan Ma'imanat (c. 1720s) came to

Bedil's 'urs gathering with his uncle when Gulshan asked I'tiqad if he ever thinks up

poems. I'tiqad said he had one couplet that was his. After he recited the first line

Gulshan gestured for I'tiqad to join the lively circle where the city's respected poets had

gathered to complete the line (*waqt-i khwāndan misra'-i sānī isharah-i dast ba-su-yi jami'-i*

sahib-i kamālān-i 'asr keh majmu'-i rangīn garm dashtand na-bud).

بنادان آنچنان روزی رساند
که دانا اندران حیران نماند

Such a day came to pass for [this] fool,
That the philosopher was not perplexed about it.

470

Another poet with the pen name Mast who was at the event responded to I'tiqad's

couplet with this verse quoted from Sa'di's *Gulistan* to echo the amateur poet's thematic

development:

کیمیا گر به غصه مرده و رنج
ابله اندر خزانه یافته گنج

> The alchemist toiled and died from his anger.
> The fool inside the storehouse got the gold.

For Gulshan to give another poet permission to read at Bedil's 'urs musha'irah would

have been a notable honor for any of the attendees at the event. To read at the

graveside of Bedil is, in a way, asking for the poet-saint's instruction and with all of

Bedil's students there, Shah Gulshan, Arzu, Anand Ram Mukhlis, and many others, the

next generation of poets attending the event would indirectly benefit from this lineage

through graveside instruction.

At the Feet or Grave of the Master, c. 1730

Ghulam 'Ali Azad Bilgrami in his tazkirah *Sarv-i Āzād* quotes an account where

Bedil actually provided instruction to Azad's friend and former traveling companion

Mir Azmat Allah Husaini Bekhabar (d. June 11, 1730)[178], directly copied from his memoir

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[178] Bekhabar is buried near the *dargāh* of Nizam al-Din Auliya in Delhi (Khalil 1978: 23).

Safinah-i Bekhabar. In the anecdote, Bekhabar and Bedil engage each other in terms of mutual respect: "This humble servant once had the chance to run into [Bedil] where I found him to be truly the perfection of creation, of taste, of affliction, and of delight," Bekhabar states. When he had sat down Bekhabar addresses Bedil, "Other than proper verses of joy and indigence, there's not been even another letter on my tongue." To which the goodnatured, poet-saint responds, "Oh Sahib, after a time I have finally benefited from similarly intentioned people such as you." Bekhabar then notes that he presented three ghazals, reading them aloud at his turn according to his rank (*faqīr keh dar zikr-i bamaqām-i khud ba khwāndah shud naql gariftah*):

<div dir="rtl">

این قدر بر زہ چپ و راست دویدن عبث است
چاک کن سینهٔ خود را سر راہی دریاب

بلند افتد چو مقطع پست سازد حسن مطلع را
کشد پائین محفل قدر من بالا نشینان را

خون شدم بیخبر ز دست تھی
جامهٔ فقر رنگ باید کرد

</div>

Since it is futile for the prattler to heedlessly run about,
Split open his chest and find the blood clot.

As the *maqtaʿ* grows, the beauty of the *matlaʿ* is rendered inferior

472

At the *mahfil*, my greatness pulled the rug out from under the high ranking attendees.

I bled to death with an empty hand, oh Bekhabar.
Ought my pauper's rags be colored?
(Bilgrami 1913: 315; Khushgu 1959: 134)

In an interesting multivalent verse, Bekhabar references his humble place in the musha'irah by playing on the role of the opening verse (*matla'*) and closing verse (*maqta'*), two important aspects forming the structural basis for the ghazal and undergirding the performative recitation in the musha'irah context. The first lines could allude to the speaker of a poem in a *mahfil* setting being a prattler (*har-zah*) who needs to have his intentions set straight, but the second does something novel indeed.

Though Bekhabar states he only gave three couplets, the middle lines themselves are an opening verse or *matla'*. In this anecdote the poet presents a species of verse that implicitly and explicitly calls attention to the musha'irah context by unifying its form and content. When the closing line or pause or interruption of the *maqta'* approaches, the dawning of the first line—the *matla'*—is over and lost to the transience of the recitational space. At one level he utilizes the poetic device of *mutazād wa mutabaqah* (opposite and same) to play off the role of the *matla'* as the dawning or rising of the ghazal itself, and the *maqta'* as the pause or cutting off of the ghazal, a quality further

473

reflected in the contrasting the words *buland-o pasht* and *bālā-o pāʾīn*—all synonyms for

high and low. Bekhabar is careful to point out his position in the hierarchy of the *majlis*

when he read according to his station (*bamaqām ba-khwāndah shud*) and his poems

themselves seem to reference the graduated nature of the event. In the second line, he

draws parallels between the structure of literature itself and the event where he reads.

The delight of the line lies in the performative tension between the words and

performative context where the verses are actually uttered aloud. Bekhabar confirms

he recited the lines and, as the second line itself states, we are to assume he brought the

mushaʿirah down with his witty rhetoric: "At the *mahfil*, my grandeur pulled the rug out

from under the high ranking attendees" (*kashad pāʾīn-i mahfil qadr-i man bālā nashīnān

rā*).

Bedil may or may not have praised Bekhabar's second set of witty mushaʿirah-

centered verses, but he did take issue with the last couplet. Someone in the audience

called out, "Mirza Sahib, I don't understand the beauty of this line." To which Bedil

responded, "In poverty, only God destines the station where you stand. In short, this

line is uninformed (*bekhabar*) [for] 'Wealth is lasting in an empty hand (*daulat pāʾīndah

dar dast-i tahī-st*).'" After his passing, several tazkirah writers criticized Bedil for

ignoring the conventions of Persian sayings, as Nasir ʿAli did in Shukr Allah Khan's gathering. Yet in this mushaʿirah anecdote Azad concentrates on an instance where Bedil found another poet actually mishandling a colloquialism. By making the play on Bekhabar's pen name, meaning "uninformed," Bedil's critique appears more jocular without the dismissive attitude that we've seen other mid-18th-century writers use against each other in debates over Indo-Persian. When Bedil's turn to recite verses had come around, Bekhabar remembers some of the poet's own lines recited there:

بیدل بہمہ تن خاک شدی لیک چہ حاصل
در خاک نشستی و بران در نہ نشستی

گویند بہشت جای خوبی ست
آنجا ہم اگر دماغ باشد

Oh Bedil, you became the same as the dirt, and for what?
You sat in dust and you did not sit

They say that heaven is a nice place—
If you have a mind to go there.

Bekhabar may have misremembered the lines or Bedil could have revised the one variant which appears more suited for the mushaʿirah setting:

بیدل همہ تن حلقہ شدی لیک چہ حاصل

Oh Bedil, you became one with the assembly, but to what end?

475

While austere and nimbly cast, Bedil's lines do not have the same delight found in

Bekhabar's second set of lines announcing the mushaʿirah. The variant from Bedil's

dīwān where the speaker is "one with the assembly or circle" (*hamah tan-i halaqah*)

could possibly be taken as a momentary appraisal of the mushaʿirah, but in comparison

the Bekhabar's lines they appear too stilted to entertain the mushaʿirah attendees. The

mushaʿirah may have closed with a poem by Khaqani Shervani (1122-1190), but

Bekhabar does not note who recited them.[179]

Bekhabar included the anecdote in his own travelogue and tazkirah *Safīnah-i*

Bekhabar. Though Bedil corrected his verse and found it "uninformed" clearly Bekhabar

was proud to have been corrected by Bedil; it's notable even to be corrected by the

preeminent literary and mystical personality of his time. The anecdote also displays

Bedil's reputation as being an institution himself for poetic convention. In the preface

of his tazkirah, Lachhmi Narayan Shafiq of Aurangabad noted how Bedil took on many

Hindu students to school them in the arts of Persian rhetoric and verse, crediting him

with establishing his style of Persian writing within his community. Of course, Bedil

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[179] Khaqani's verse:

My neighbor heard my crying and said:
Well, another night came to an end for Khaqani!

همسایه شنید نالهام گفت
خاقانی را دگر شب آمد انتهی

476

didn't need to do this as there were many Hindus who had perfect command of the language; during this time period language was not linked with communal or ethnic identity the way it has been conceived today.

In contrast to Bekhabar's jovial and enthusiastic reception of Bedil's correction, the tazkirah writer Bindraban Das Khushgu appears rather thin skinned when it came to the correction of his verse by one of Bedil's students named Lalah Shiv Ram Das Haya᾽ (d. 1731). In an extended narration, he writes:

> One time your humble, self-abasing Khushgu went to a gathering of poets and a banquet that Haya᾽ had organized. I had came with a letter for him stamped with Khan-i Arzu's seal, but upon seeing my indigent posture, he showed me contempt. After reading the letter, Haya᾽ asked my particulars. Since I told him that our fathers had been well-acquainted in the emperor ῾Alamgir's army, he adjourned the group, hugged me, and showed me the honors I was due, saying, "First present your poems for the banquet's entertainment then afterwards join us in conversation."
> That same day I had written a ghazal which I had given to my ustad for his perusal so that it might receive his good marks (*basharf-i sad rasānīdah būdam*). I had also read it before Ma῾ni Yab Khan and some other eminent people of this art where it was favorably received. Since I recited something that was "fresh" and novel, I wrote down the opening and closing lines:

<div dir="rtl">

کجا با نرگسی پهلو زند چشم سخن گویش
هلالی خط به بیتی می کشد در پیش ابرویش

برای صحبت خوبان سکندر طالعی یابد
مگر آیینه بنشیند دمی زانو به زانویش

</div>

477

<div dir="rtl">

مگر ذوق سخن دانی بیاد او دهد نامم

تو ای قاصد به تقریبی بخوان مقطع ز خوشگویش

</div>

Where the eye of his poet emulates a narcissus,

A curved line is drawn over his eyebrow with a couplet.

You need luck like Alexander to keep the company of good people,

Though you must sit knee to knee with a mirror for a moment.

Although a knack for writing poems in his memory gives me my name,[180]

You, oh messenger, still have to at least read your Khushgu's last line

[Hayaʾ] latched on to the opening distich and said, "The phrase has been cast backwards. Actually, it's not the poet's eye that emulates a narcissus as an eye would. It's not the definition of the poet's intention." Hearing this I got quiet.

The next day I complained to a respected ustad[181] about this careless correction. He said, "Sometimes we take for granted a meaning that is the day-to-day [speech] of the ancients. While this was a powerful blow to your ego, Hayaʾ was right in what he said—however, in my view, the jab hadn't come with the appropriate humanity." And thus I corrected it:

<div dir="rtl">

زند کی نرگسی پهلو به چشمان سخن گویش

</div>

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[180] This line contains a double entendre. The word "*khushgū*"—our narrator's pen name meaning "eloquence"—turns the *maqtaʿ* into something lyrically delightful in that it parallels the speaker's voice and the function of the *maqtaʿ* and *takhallus* as literary devices. A variant could read: "You, oh Messenger, must read the last line of his eloquence as best you can."

[181] My guess is this particular ustad was Arzu given Khushgu's connection to him and the words sound like something Arzu might say given his intellectual inclination toward language as discussed by Dudney (2013).

هلالی خط به بیتی می کشد در پیش ابرویش

> When a narcissus emulates the eyes of its poet,
> A curved line is drawn over its eyebrow by a couplet.

Khushgu had his pocket diary with him, and he read a verse that one of Bedil's students,

Haya², took issue with. In turn, Khushgu's pride seems to have gotten the better of him

in this interchange. In Khushgu's defense, Haya² was overzealous in his correction and

appeared hierarchically petty when welcoming Khushgu. The two Hindu poets made up

afterwards when Khushgu welcomed Haya² to his house for another mushaʿirah and

some food.[182] The middle lines and the ending line display a remarkable formal aspect

that directly alludes to the mushaʿirah space. Alexander, known for his luck, is said to

have erected a mirror on a large tower to kill a dragon whose mere gaze had the ability

to slaughter people. Popular legends also hold that he also had a mirror given to him by

a *faqīr* in India that revealed the true inner nature of the beholder. Lastly, Holding a

mirror on the knees is popular theme in Persian poetry, something a self-focused

Beloved often does to admire his own beauty. Khushgu turned it around to be deployed

in the mushaʿirah's recitational setting.

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[182] Actually, Haya² was forbidden by his *Kukulliyān*(?) order from eating food prepared outside the brotherhood, but he made an exception for Khushgu since they had such a good time reciting poetry together (see Pellò 2013).

479

The last line is another clear example of meaning and formal structure directly illustrating the social workings of the mushaʿirah. The poet and Lover only write poems for an unattainable Beloved. That is, the poet can only adopt a pen name if the Beloved refuses to see him as the Lover. In spite of this productive failure, the poem's speaker must rely upon a fickle and devious narrator to read the closing line—this character is, of course, a messenger upon whom the Lover can never rely. Like Bekhabar's verse before in the interchange with Bedil, Khushgu's verse is a species of ghazal whose structure and content parallels the social intent of the mushaʿirah space through a lyrical feed back loop where the listener is continually delighted at the multivalent references lines like this engender. It's no wonder that Maʿni Yab Khan enjoyed the lines Khushgu read aloud to him. Khushgu crafted a poem that encompasses the lyrical rise and fall of the mushaʿirah space which unified the form and content of the ghazal.

Though Khushgu was humbled in his interchange with Hayaʾ, he has a small victory over another one of his critics at one of Bedil's ʿurs mushaʿirahs. Almost out of spite he steps into the circle of poets after Bedil's dīwān has been read and presents an extended nazm or narrative poem in which he attempts to right the injustice of his critic Saʾid al-Din Akhtar (d. 1740/1) who had degraded Khushgu's verse at an earlier

poetry gathering. The incident Khushgu narrates was during one of Khan-i Arzu's

mushaʿirahs in the presence of two other Hindu poets, Lala Garbakhsh Huzur and Lala

Hakim Chand Nudrat. As Khushgu states: "I wrote an opening line and Arzu said,

'Bravo!' / The opening was like a rising sun and it is this here: The zealot keeps his

prayer-mat far from the drunkards. / Please excuse me if marks of wine fall on my

face." The *nazm* is a poem read in a mushaʿirah about a poem read in mushaʿirah (see

Appendix S).

    Akhtar's main gripe concerns how wine falls according to poetic conventions.

Khushgu used the verb *uftādan* (to fall, to happen unexpectedly) with the noun *dāgh-i*

mei (marks of wine), saying the marks of wine fall upon the Lover's shirt. Contrary to

this, Akhtar's position, as evidenced by a Hafiz line from Hafiz ("Hafiz, you yourself

can't even hide this wine-stained rag / Eh, with your clean collar, Preacher, you'll have

to forgive me")[183] states that wine can only be smeared or rubbed into the Lover's shirt

and is thus construed with the verb *ālūdan* as in *mei ālūdan* or the shirt smeared with

wine (*harqah-i mei-ālūd*). To defend his position, Khushgu points his listeners to the

poem by Muhammad ʿAli Saʾib Tabrizi (1601-1677): "Marks of wine have fallen down

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[183]

حافظ به خود نپوشید این خرقه می آلود

ای شیخ پاکدامن معذور دار ما را

481

and blossomed all over my shirt / Just like a wine bottle, wine-drinking has become my lot."[184] The verse proves Khushgu's point since Saʾib used it. That is, since an acknowledged master like Saʾib used the phrase "marks of wine have fallen down" (*dāgh-i mei uftādah-ast*), it proves the usage could be acceptable in Persian lyrical poetry. While it appears the ʿurs of Bedil was not only for bibliomancy and saintly intercession through poetic recitation, there was something more going on in this interchange beyond a simple literary disagreement.

As we know, the Persian literary community had been debating the contrasting "ancient" (*qudumā*) and "modern" (*mutākhkharīn*) approaches to literature since the early 1600s which we saw stages in Munir Lahori's imaginary mushaʿirah in which he attacked some of his *tāzah-goʾī* contemporaries. While Khushgu used the ʿurs mushaʿirah as a public stage to defend his poetic sensibilities he was also advertising his literary alliances by citing Saʾib to legitimate his verse. Saʾib, is one of the most famous "fresh speakers," and Hafiz could be no better example of the "classical" voice in Persian. Hence, it appears Akhtar fell on Munir Lahori's side of the battle lines in his critique of Khushgu's verse, favoring the classical approach.

184

داغ می گل گل به طرف دامن افتاده‌است
همچو مینا میکشی بر گردنم افتاده‌است

482

In examining Bedil's ʿurs and its accompanying anecdotes, we see how the poetry's formal and aesthetic structure tell us a far richer history of Urdu/Persian literature in the 18th century than a mere reconstruction of its context. Khushgu's *nazm* presents almost a real-time picture of a series of events and debates centered in the public space of Bedil's graveside mushaʿirahs. Importantly, this anecdote also confirms that mushaʿirahs became the setting for the contentious *tāzah-goʾī* literary debate on proper poetic usage in original verse that would continue into the 19th century and later be refracted through the vernacular concerns of Urdu.

Verse as Public History

As we saw in Chapter One, verse commentaries were a common feature in poetry criticism during this time. Khushgu's *nazm* exemplifies this but it also provides an example of literature's materiality at a time when language and poetics were so hotly debated. Anecdotal narrations in the tazkirah tradition are aesthetic tellings in and of themselves. That is, the tazkirahs were part of a biographical lattice work where their "narrators intended their anecdotes to form a frame for social, political, and religious commentary" (El-Hibri 1999: 216). They preserve a socially imbricated

interpretive scaffolding for a partially mass mediated, widely practiced, and quotidian literary practice. Mushaʿirah anecdotes do not provide context in the way contemporary scholarship on culture imagines it because they do not need to. For the anecdote, context is only important for the transmission of meaningful, poignant, and well-timed lyrical utterance and often times the verse is context enough.

Bindraban Das Khushgu's *nazm* presented at Bedil's ʿurs marks a poetic and historical moment that frames the mushaʿirah institution in the terms most important to its practitioners. The anecdote itself appears twice: once in Shafiq Aurangabadi's *Gul-i Raʿnā* and in Khushgu's own *Safīnah-i Khushgū.* In turn we have three narratives frames through which the incident moves. First, the tazkirah captures the popular conception of the event as Khushgu remembers it. Secondly, we have the *nazm* about a ghazal recited at Arzu's gathering which was in turn is recited at another gathering at Bedil's tomb. Lastly, we have a trace of the original moment of contention itself as it occurred in Arzu's home and memorialized in the *nazm*. What this collection of frames reinforces is the internal importance of recitational space as a poetic medium in and of itself. The very structure of the literature and its depiction in tazkirahs reflects the way poets

conceived the institution. We turn to Stefano Pellò's position that telling and retelling lyrical anecdotes governs the late Mughal socio-literary sphere:

> In a similar fashion, what we have called the lore of later Mughal Indo-Persian poetic circles, their web of tellings, was textualized and translated onto a regulated representational plane, yet at the same time the result of this process can be read as a telling itself, one that surveyed the pre-textual and the con-textual spaces of these poetic circles in order to shape a live, localized, and influential narrative of the specific world of Persian poetical production and reception in late Mughal north India. (2009)

In Khushgu's case, the *nazm* as a narrative form was able to house one debate about a larger contestation over specifically *tāzah-goʾī* Persian verse. Additionally, it shows the importance of Bedil's grave as a site for connecting his poetic sensibility to a chain of legitimization. After all, Khushgu memorializes the event in his opening line: "For [your] humble Khushgu, at the shrine of the literary greats, / there is a plea and you ought to lend me your ears" (*bandah khushgu ra ba-dargāh-i buzurgan-i sukhan / altmasi hast bayad dashtan goshi ba-man*). The layers of Khushgu's nazm are part of the "web of tellings" that capture oral and cultural realities into the prison of the pen. To excavate some of this publicness or some the messiness of the late Mughal town square from the tazkirah we simply have to dig a bit deeper into the very structure of the narratives, jokes, and poems tazkirah writers present to us.

485

It serves us to return to two ghazals that came before whose formal aspect is reflective of the mushaʿirah social structure at large. If we remember in his encounter with Bedil, Bekhabar recited this self-referential verse:

بلند افتد چو مقطع پست سازد حسن مطلع را
کشد پائین محفل قدر من بالا نشینان را

> As the *maqtaʿ* falls, the beauty of the *matlaʿ* opening line is cast down
> At the *mahfil*, my status pulled the rug out from the people in the front row.

Bekhabar uses the pull of the ghazal form to comment on the performative expectations of the mushaʿirah setting. The first line tells us what the *matlaʿ* and *maqtaʿ* do in the ghazal setting as one would with a joke, and the next line resolves the tension of the setup. The resolution would presumably draw some chuckles from the audience, which is humorous and delightful because the *maqtaʿ* actually narrativizes what would happen in the mushaʿirah setting. Similarly, *maqtaʿ* means to pause or interrupt, adding a third meta-discursive layer to the poem. Khushgu's *maqtaʿ* that he presented to Maʿni Yab Khan and read at Hayaʾ's gathering also performs this function.

مگر ذوق سخن دانی بیاد او دهد نامم
تو ای قاصد به تقریبی بخوان مقطع ز خوشگویش

> Although a knack for writing poems in his memory gives me my name,
> You, oh messenger, must at least read your Khushgu's last line!

486

Khushgu's rhetorical abilities are at their finest in this line. The final line of the poem traditionally gives the poet's *takhallus* or pen name. Even though a Beloved would presumably be the catalyst for poem writing when the Lover speaks, this poem's speaker is acknowledging the Lover's debt to the ghazal form itself. Like Bekhabar's line, an ending like this would have "brought the house down" in its meta-discursive and lyrical pleasure. On the page, it appears obtuse and pale; had it been recited before an audience, the multivalent references off the poet's tongue would have astounded the listeners' ears. To circumvent this issue, tazkirah writers provide us with the recitational context in which the verses would have been uttered so we too as readers can share in some of the delight experienced in the gathering.

Tazkirah writers were attempting to capture the *shokhī* or playfulness or mischievousness of the recitational gathering. Writing about these "web of tellings" is much more difficult than if we were there listening to Khushgu recite his composition. The context of the *nazm* itself would have apparent to all the listeners involved because probably Arzu and his coterie of poets must certainly have been at this particular event. In the performative context of Khushgu's nazm the playfulness is magnified in the way Khushgu announces it at Bedil's ʿurs mushaʿirah. Arzu was probably at the event in

question and he would then be hearing the verse again. It is equally conceivable that

Arzu would playfully shout "bravo" again when Khushgu narrates the events of the

previous mushaʿirah and introduces the line a second time within the context of the

graveside *nazm.*[185]

Khushgu's *nazm* and many other examples show how recited verse was often

intertextual with the very setting in which it was circulated. This recalls the image of

verse sung in the bazaar that tazkirah writers would often circulate which instructs us

on the everyday life of poetry in an "literacy aware" society were a verse or a couplet

could present a more insightful and ambiguous commentary on an observation or

irony. The mushaʿirah as a literary space afforded this social aspect an institution

among for a coterie of listeners and reciters to commune over the delight of lyric

poetry. The mushaʿirah anecdote reflects this as well in its ability to capture well-timed

asides and astute observations, narrative and entertaining qualities tazkirah writers

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[185]   I wrote an opening line and Arzu said, "Bravo!"
         The opening was like a rising sun and it is this here:

         "The zealot keeps his prayer-mat far from the drunkards.
         Please excuse me if marks of wine fall on my face."

picked up on as well which allowed them to create a more intertextually complex understanding of tazkirahs' communicative abilities than previously allowed.

Early in the 18th century, Sayyid Ja'far Ruhi (d. November 1741)[186] went with his companions on a pilgrimage to *tāzah-go'ī* poet Nasir 'Ali's grave situated in Nizam al-Din Auliya's tomb complex in Delhi. One friend came in front of Nasir's grave and said, "What came of the saying of yours, anyhow, that went:

خاک گردیدیم و می رقصه هنوز افغان ما
خم شکست اما نمی ریزد می جوشان ما

'I turned to dust and yet my lament dances on;
the bottle broke but my frothing wine isn't spilling?' "

Ruhi said, "That lament of Nasir's is the one dancing on your tongue!"[187]

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[186] Ruhi makes it into Arzu's *Majma' al-Nafā'is* but he doesn't have much good to say about his poetry aside from having a Sufi-like nature. By Arzu's estimation Ruhi hadn't composed enough imitation of the masters to craft original works of his own.

[187] Ruhi's response is well timed and hilarious given the context for he seems to also be accusing his friend of being a drunkard. Nasir 'Ali was known for his drinking, but later renounced it when he took a pledge to a Sufi order (Bilgrami 2012: 482).

5.4 A Vernacular Turn

As we have been discussing through out this project, the literary sphere's musha'irahs begin to adopt Urdu, or *Rekhtah* or *Hindī* as it was also known, as a Persianized literary vernacular during the 1700s. If we remember from Chapter Two, Shah Hatim's *Dīwān-zādah* contains the first documentation of specifically Urdu musha'irahs beginning around 1720 which is around the time Wali's famous *dīwān* reached Delhi. Mir Taqi Mir reached Delhi in 1739 and probably accompanied Arzu to the 'urs musha'irah as well. As such a famous literary focal point during that time period, it would have been unlikely that Mir did not go. Mir's contemporary and friend Rafi' Sauda, on the hand, documents his participation at Bedil's musha'irah in three Urdu-language lampoons against a man named Mulla Nudrat and his daughter.

In the context of Bedil's graveside musha'irahs, an Indic language could have been recited in the 'urs as early as 1724, four years after the poet-saint passed and around time time Khushgu began compiling his tazkirah. The poet Khwajah Muhammad (d. 1733) who wrote under the pen name 'Aqal was part of Arzu's contingent of like-minded poets for he notes 'Aqal's particulars and several verses in his own tazkirah. It's probable that 'Aqal accompanied Arzu to Bedil's 'urs gathering on

at least one occasion where Khushgu tells us he heard ʿAqal recite 60 to 70 quatrains in praise of a bee sting on the Beloved's chin (*rubāʿi-hā-yi khwud qarīb shīst-haftad dar tāʿrīf-i zakham-i zanbūr bar zankhadan-i maʿshūq mī khwānd*) (Khushgu 1956: 179). What's most significant about Khushgu's entry on ʿAqal is that he also notes ʿAqal's taste for *Hindī* poetry (*wa zauq bah shiʿr-i hindī nez dasht*), and "in those days he wrote under the *Hindī* pen name, *Buddhawant*—a translation of ʿAqal" (ibid.). Khushgu does not refer to Buddhawant, ʿAqal's *Hindī* persona, specifically reciting verse in an Indic language at the mushaʿirah. This long poem in praise of a Beloved's stung chin could have been in Persian or an Indic tongue like Braj Bhasha or Awadhi. For our discussion of the mushaʿirah this is a significant note from Khushgu for it hints at a multilingual context for Bedil's mushaʿirah in which poets with varying lyrical and aesthetic alliances presented their compositions in not just Persian but perhaps some other idiom.

The Disappearance of a John Doe, c. 1760

The late 1750s marks the time when Bedil's graveside mushaʿirahs began to fade. ʿAbd al-Ghani, an amateur historian of Bedil, estimates that 1771 was the last year of the *ʿurs* based on his incorrect assumption that Sauda left Delhi in 1771. Sauda left Delhi in

491

1757, so the latest Sauda could have recited these compositions at the grave would have been 1756 and may have been earlier but probably not before 1754. On this note, Ghani assumes Sauda presented his verses at the *last ʿurs* mushaʿirah. There is nothing in the verses or any other historical source to show us that Sauda's recitation marks the last gathering. Final mushaʿirahs seem to be a trope among 20th-century literary historians (see Introduction).

While Ghani's date is incorrect, he raises a good point about a generational shift underway in Delhi's literary sphere at a time when the centralized Mughal state was in shambles. Urdu and Persian writers were moving to Lucknow for better patronage circles. Additionally, poets tied to the literary economy that Bedil and his direct inheritors had established were simply passing away. Arzu, Walih, and Khushgu all died within the same year: 1756. Arzu had already moved to Lucknow in 1754 but his body was brought back to Delhi. Anand Ram Mukhlis had already passed away six years prior in 1750, Ummid died in 1746 while eating a watermelon, and Maʿni Yab Khan died in 1744 while having sex. Only Hazin remained but he had exiled himself to Benares and thought Bedil's verse was only good for comic relief according to Muhammad Husain Azad. Of our two traveling poets, Hakim was living in Aurangabad where he had joined

492

the literary circles of Azad Bilgrami and his student Shafiq, and ʿUzlat had returned to

Surat. When he completed his "world travels" around India, there is a joke that a Sufi

welcomed him at mushaʿirah with a double entendre:

<div dir="rtl">

عبدالولی بسورت بندر رسیده است
شکر خدا بدست قلندر رسیده است

</div>

    ʿAbd al-Wali has reached the Port of Surat
    Thanks be to God that this mystic is now at hand

The Sufi was calling poor ʿUzlat a monkey-face, making a play on words with the phrase

"*ba-surat-i bandar*" as in "ʿAbd al-Wali has become a monkey-face" (Qazi Nur al-Din

Husain Khan Rizwi Faʾiq 1933: 76).

    Aside from the legend about ʿUzlat being called names, the third generation of

writers after Bedil appreciated and read his verse but they were not directly connected

with even the remnants of Bedil's gatherings. I believe Ahmad Shah Durrani's attack on

Delhi in 1757 may have been the final blow that could have actually ended the

gatherings. Unlike the aftermath of Nadir Shah's devastation of Delhi, it appears the

Bedil's death anniversary celebrations were not rekindled after Durrani's attack since

too many of the literati had left town. Even though Mir Dard was around until 1785, I

have yet to find any mention of his circle keeping Bedil's candles burning at any kind of

ʿurs. Additionally, Mir Dard was involved in his own traditions around his connection to

the his father's spiritual lineages. While there was another blossoming of tazkirah

writing around Durrani's attack with about eight volumes completed between 1774 and

1785, none of them mention the festivities of the *ʿurs* mushaʿirah.

Sauda and one of Doggerel's Pimps

Sometime between Arzu leaving town in 1754 and the Afghan's attack in 1757,

Mirza Rafiʿ Sauda (1713-1781) recited three compositions making fun of a Maulvi

Nudrat (c. late 1700s) in one of the later mushaʿirahs at Bedil's grave. Earlier Nudrat had

made fun of one Sauda's Urdu compositions that he recited at Bedil's posthumous

gathering in a Persian ghazal—actually a *hazl* or satiric poem in the ghazal form—that

he too read aloud at the *ʿurs* mushaʿirah. Nudrat was a local cleric who had a small

coterie of Persian students. In the tazkirahs, Nudrat Kashmiri seems only to be

remembered for his attempt in satirizing Sauda and for instructing a student named

ʿAbd Allah Khalat who befriended Bindraban Das Khushgu when Khushgu hosted him at

his home. Nudrat also had a daughter who appeared to have been equally infamous.

494

This is another striking instance where verse actually tells us something of the mushaʿirah 's communicative history. The lines themselves, as we will see, make it apparent the poets were dueling in the shrine space at Bedil's grave. Moreover, the formal elements of Sauda's first composition discussed below, a *tazmīn* or quotation, also mirror the mushaʿirah setting in that his composition encompasses the original literary volley Nudrat launched at him. Furthermore, the verses themselves bring a clearer picture of the mushaʿirah context than even tazkirah anecdotes about the battle. Saʿdat Khan Nasir's *Khush Maʿrikah-i Zebā* (1842) covers only the second couplet in Nudrat's ghazal. Husain Azad picked up the first stanza in his 1880 tazkirah *Āb-i Hayāt*, but he does not illustrate the larger context in which the verses were recited. Azad only tells us that Sauda wrote the *tazmīn* in response to Nudrat's challenge and turned the verse back in his face, using a parallel meter and rhyme scheme. ʿAbd al-Ghani in his 1957 article on Bedil's grave presents us only Nudrat's ghazal to which Sauda recited his response. However, the larger composition tells us more about the context and the socio-literary import of the event at an interesting moment of vernacular and stylistic contestation. It's only by reading the whole quintain from

495

Sauda's works do we see the brilliance of Sauda's riposte and why he uses the

mukhammas form to intimately tear apart Nudrat's accusations and his verse as well.

In the his *hazl,* Nudrat accuses Sauda of being a poor Urdu poet, who violated

literary sensibilities to the point of spilling blood: "Since that wine-drinking Rafiᶜ

spilled meaning's blood / That mad man Sauda in his lust spoiled Urdu language's

honor." It appears Sauda recited a verse that turned Nudrat's stomach, "All by himself in

the battle, that Rafiᶜ who's vile / On Sauda's own head, in ignorance spewed bile." He

must have heard Sauda recite it at the posthumous mushaᶜirah for he says:"Like a crow,

tonight you eat the brains of people listening / This total imbecile cast nothing but

noise and tumult in the gathering." He ends the verse by referencing the first couplet

on the blood-red wine of meaning Sauda was casting about: "Since that line of doggerel

cast the handy work of its absurd colors, / Wherever there is Urdu recitation, its heart's

blood was scattered" (see Appendix T).

Nothing in the poem tells us definitively that Nudrat recited the ghazal at

Bedil's ᶜurs in front of a crowd of Delhi's poets though, as we will see below, there are

hints in Sauda's response that the verse was in fact read aloud in Bedil's former home.

Yet, it is obvious that he was responding to a particular poem that Sauda's recited in the

context of a mushaʿirah and the poem in question was in Urdu. This last couplet makes

the language question clear where Nudrat appears to decry Re*khtah* as something even

Sauda violated. By this point we are well familiar with the blood and wine connections

in Urdu and Persian verse and Nudrat uses this motif as a pretext to play with the Mirza

Rafiʿ's pen name, *sauda,* which means someone gone mad. It appears the Nudrat was

arguing over the appropriateness reciting a bad Urdu verse in gathering by eliding the

verb *rekhtan* (to scatter, to combine, to cast) with the word *Rekhtah,* referencing Urdu

and alluding to its "mixed" origins. In no way should be assume that Nudrat was

deriding Urdu writing in general nor should we assume that he was pillorying Sauda for

reciting an Urdu verse in a Persian setting. As we know Mus'hafi addressed this point in

Chapter Two when he chronicled his meeting with Qatil over Persian recitation in an

Urdu mushaʿirah and in the *munāsirah* or prose gathering with the *munshī* Mughal Fani

where both Persian and Urdu prose were read.

Sauda's response shows his linguistic and poetic dexterity, splashing the

"handiwork" of "*Rekhtah's* scattered blood" back in Nudrat face where he casts Nudrat's

entire *hazl* in a *tazmīn* or imitative variation as a quintain or *mukhammas.* This form is

particularly suitable for *tazmīns* in order to develop variations off of another's form. In

497

other words, rather than creating a Persian repost to Nudrat's challenge, Sauda uses

Nudrat's two-line ghazal as a metrical and rhymed model over which he tacks three

Urdu lines (see Appendix U).

When Nudrat wrote, "That wine-drinking Rafiᶜ [Sauda] spilled meaning's blood /

Out of madness, Sauda sullied Urdu's honor" in Persian, Sauda shot it back with three

lines of Urdu:

> It's better to compose in Urdu than cast something bad in [Persian]
> When did I ever murder someone's theme to compose *Rekhtah?*
> Hearing my Urdu verse, it is impudent of you to say:
>
> *That wine-drinking Rafiᶜ [Sauda] spilled meaning's blood*
> *In a fit of insanity, Sauda sullied Urdu's honor*

Within the poem, Sauda notes where Nudrat recited the missive against him, stating,

"In rancor and with severity at Bedil's shrine, / When he recited nonsense and ill cast

verse tonight." As if castigating Nudrat for even acknowledging Bedil, Sauda states,

"You pimp of doggerel, two times a dog, don't look to Bedil! / Everything is fine here so

just march to Kashmir at once!"

Sauda's rhetorical genius can be seen in these lines where he not only defends

his poetic abilities, but also demonstrates a facile command of both Urdu and Persian to

defend an emergent vernacular sensibility. That is, Sauda corrects Nudrat's ridicule and

498

responds not just in Persian, but also in Urdu; and not just with his own lines, but with

Nudrat's as well. Even though Sauda's design was to skewer Nudrat attacking his verse,

Sauda allows Nudrat's structure and content to inform how he addresses his

competitor. In the spirit of the generous rivalry, the formal aspects actually bring the

two reciters into very intimate contact with each others' verse. Sauda was able to take

the insult directed at him in the context of the ʿurs mushaʿirah and weave its meaning

into an attack on his competitor.

In the mushaʿirah context of the late 1750s, Bedil's grave remained a relevant

battleground for poets to contend with each other in rather subtle and nuanced forms

of competitive literary sociability. Also, Sauda's macaronic poem is further evidence of

both Persian and Urdu being recited in 1700s mushaʿirahs. In this example, it appears as

though Sauda was using any means at his disposal to attack and make fun of Nudrat,

even calling him a "pimp of doggerel" in a Persian *izāfat* construction with the Indic

word for pimp, *bharuwā*. These types of inventions, using an Indic word in a Persian

grammatical construction, were usually discouraged by Urdu poets. Yet, Sauda uses the

term *bharuwā-yi pūch* to great effect. It could be taken as a direct linguistic snub to

Nudrat who was implicitly trashing Sauda's language abilities. In other words, the *izāfat* on *bharuwā* is meant to be grammatically and linguistically rude snide.

Sauda and Nudrat's duel prefaces a complex linguistic, intertextual, and recitational web much like we saw in the competition between Khushgu and Akhtar at Bedil's mushaʿirah. The narrative web of Sauda and Nudrat's recitation is also similarly complex. First we have an unknown poem in Urdu that Sauda previously read at one of Bedil's ʿurs gatherings; this is evidenced by Nudrat stating, "Like a crow, tonight you are eating the brains of the audience" (*chun kulāgh im-shab keh maghz-i sāmʿān mī khord*)." Nudrat responds to this unknown verse in Persian with a *hazl* or ghazal-based lambast. Sauda, not to be outdone, takes Nudrat's own words and composes a macaronic *mukhammas* on top of it, three-fifths of it in Urdu.

This does not stop here. Sauda then composes another *mukhammas* just to drive the point home, but this one was only in Urdu. In one stanza, Sauda tells us squarely that the occasion was Bedil's ʿurs where Nudrat completed a ghazal "whose meter was completely doubtful in every way / no matter how you scan it from morn until night." Based on Nudrat's doubtful literary abilities Sauda tells him, "In the end, based on your poem, we have this advice for you: / Bridle the horse, don't bridle me, [instead] bridle

500

yourself!" This couplet brings our feedback loop home when Sauda utters his first line: "That one ghazal that you completed in the ʿurs..."—again a poem about a poem about yet another poem. Sauda found that Nudrat had transgressed the gatherings norms of comportment by writing a lampoon of his verse stating, "This is not some [Kashmiri] shawl that you can just wash, oh Maulvi / Now that you've torn the skies, what kind of darning can be done?" Ripping the skies (*āsmān ko phatāna*) implies violating decorum to the greatest degree. Curiously Sauda asks, "How can I make good on this? What would Khan-i Arzu do?"

Sauda's invocation of Khan-i Arzu in the last stanza presented above is a curious allusion in the context of what appears as a very vocal defense of Arzu's particular form of literary sensibility. It's as if Sauda was saying, "Given the fact that Arzu had to put up with Hazin's attack, what would he do were he in my shoes with you going after me?" The invocation also alludes to Arzu not being present at this particular ʿurs mushaʿirah; he could have been dead with his body en route to Delhi or this could have taken place after Arzu relocated to Lucknow in the east. Either way, the multiple levels of Arzu's absence were undoubtedly felt given his close connection to the festivities and Sauda himself.

It is also very striking that all of these compositions recited in the ʿurs

mushaʿirah reference Arzu in some way, attesting to his active social status in Delhi's

literary sphere in the 1740s and before. They also comment on his deep involvement

with yearly mushaʿirah. Even though Arzu was most likely not present when Sauda and

Nudrat had their literary duel, the social institutions he had set up and the groups he

had patronized and instructed were still mediating literary sociability at the time.

While Arzu's intellectual contribution can be examined through reading his extant

works on philology and literary history, the ʿurs mushaʿirah at Bedil's grave shows that

Arzu also had influence in routing Delhi's literary sphere. That is, even the idea of Arzu

being present for these recitations legitimates the reciters' poetic speech. In this

regard, even a year after dying or moving away, Arzu takes his place as one of the

rightful vernacular literary ancestors to the public practice of Urdu and Persian literary

ideals; and as we know this was a lineage concretely connected with Bedil and Gulshan,

both of whom Arzu counted in his inheritance and intellectual pursuits.

Given Arzu's taste for contention and the value he placed in social discord to

create interesting literary context, it would seem this generous rivalry between Sauda

and Nudrat could also be referencing a larger literary context where contention was

502

the norm. In Akhtar's gripe with Khushgu, the disagreement fell along fairly

predictable lines of poetic taste. Akhtar proffered a "classical" example from Hafiz, and

with Khushgu, who was devoted to Arzu, Bedil and the *tāzah-goʾī* aesthetics they valued,

brought out Saʾib. It is unclear but perhaps Nudrat was on Hazin's side of the literary

debate given his apparent disapproval of Sauda's Urdu, Persian, and perhaps macaronic

verses. Since we do not know what Sauda's original verse was that Nudrat objected to, it

is impossible to say if Nudrat's quibble was more predictable stylistic or just a matter of

personal enmity. Sauda appears offended in the first line, asking how Nudrat could

make fun of his Persian. But perhaps it wasn't just Sauda's Persian that Nudrat

disapproved of, but the method in which Sauda composed verse according to the tenets

of *tāzah-goʾī* aesthetics. Sauda seems to allude to Urdu coming to the forefront of

literary production and in this stanza he hints at an implied linguistic competition

between a Persian speaker and an Urdu speaker.

> The thing is, how could you make fun of my Persian?
> Whoever was ahead in this battle, it's their *Rekhtah* that flourishes
> Go on and give him your blessing in your own language, my dear,
> Taking a shoe in hand he will ask you that same question:
> > Bridle the horse, don't bridle me, [and why not] bridle yourself?

He dares Nudrat to keep saying "prayers" in his language (*bolī meiñ apnī tum duʿā dū jo*

kisū ko mere lāl). If he keeps speaking blessings like he does, the one he prays for will

503

answer with a shoe beating (*jūtī ko le ke hāth meiñ tum se kare voh savāl*) (see Appendix V).[188]

Yet, Sauda does not stop here, he even takes a dig at Maulvi Nudrat's daughter. Sauda paints an image of an overprivileged daughter who gets accolades and pats-on-back because of her father's social and intellectual connections as a member of the academic elite. People fawn over and praise her because of who her father is when nothing that she has produced or thought up with is worth but the empty words of her sycophants. She gets praised for accomplishing all the arts on earth while angels in heaven can scarcely believe their eyes when she sings, recites, or writes in calligraphy; it's like nothing the've ever seen. For Sauda, her undeserved reputation in poetry leaves him stumped and he invokes Bedil again saying, "We keep hearing how accomplished she is in the art of poetry / Had Bedil been there at that time, he would have learned from her." For Sauda, the daughter's reputation and Nudrat's bragging are an example of both their inappropriateness or *na-mauzūnīyat* (see Appendix W):

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[188] What's curious is how these works might have been composed: were they improvised on the spot or did Sauda take out his pocket diary and jot down these verses? All four of the compositions—Sauda's first ghazal, Nudrat's lambast, and Sauda's two responses—all appear to have been read aloud at Bedil's ʿurs mushaʿirah.

In short, what can I say about all this learning and perfection?
There is no way she could have crafted a maulvi's verse and recited it.
Lord knows, is it he who is uncultivated or his daughter?
Either she's being sly with him or she simply thinks he's an ass.

Bedil's grave had become the popular ground zero for a striking set of debates on not just the use of appropriate idioms and lyrical development, but also on the deployment of Urdu or *Rekhtah* as a literary vernacular. Like the other mushaʿirah verse we have examined in this chapter and through out the dissertation, these instances show how recited verse connected poetic meaning with poets' social setting. As stated in previous sections, mushaʿirah verse casts the world according to notions of delight and entertainment endemic to the ghazal. Lyrical meaningfulness is brought into a material existence not only through the aural means of sound, but in the way societies of reciters and listeners understand literature as a social practice. Additionally, nothing could be more material than setting aside times and places to debate meaning, theme, and poetic formal elements as they carry ideas of delight and humor. I imagine for the attendees at the shrine this literary duel was quite entertaining.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have addressed the anecdotal history of Bedil's posthumous mushaʿirah and some of its verse recited at the yearly gatherings in his former residence. In the pre-colonial period over the 1700s, it was the first and only regularly held literary gathering that was organized on a mass scale with hot food handed out, medicines being sold, and the usual flower-scattering and candle-lighting associated with Indo-Persian shrine practices. Uniquely, the gatherings were punctuated by the voices of poets reciting compositions aloud as they read from his collected works and presented their own compositions. These were the cosmopolitan inheritors of Persian literature's "fresh-speaking" style being debated, critiqued, and developed during this time period. This group of men, and perhaps women, who knew and loved Bedil kept the event going from his death in 1720 until roughly 1760 or so. Where as most gathering fizzled out after a year or two, this forty year span makes it one of the longest running yearly gatherings devoted foremost to literary circulation and enjoyment.

Concentrating solely on this event, there are four main areas through which we can examine Bedil's ʿurs mushaʿirah. First, I examined the cultural implications of public recitation in the mushaʿirah through Bedil's image as a poet-saint, a level of

506

religious and literary achievement to which other writers also aspired during the 1700s

and before. A poet having a unique hold on mystical knowledge not only legitimated

speech in the mushaʿirah, but it also authorized a personality like Bedil to be revered as

saint after his passing as other poets recited at his graveside seeking more than just

literary intercession. The few anecdotes that capture poets' recitations at the

mushaʿirah show us how Bedil was eulogized through intertextual nods to a lyrical

imagery associated with dead paradigmatic Lovers. The second focuses examines the

geography of graveside recitation by looking at anecdotes about Hazin, Gulshan, and

Hafiz's graves in addition to the festivities organized by Arzu and others at Bedil's tomb.

Shrines, mosques, and madrasahs became important sites for impromptu and even

formalized verse exchange. The final two sections examine several heated debates that

arose in Bedil's graveside gatherings. At the formal level mushaʿirah verse constructs

poets' competitive view on verse exchange through intertextual self-reference, that is

poems about composing that call attention to their own recitation. Khushgu's metered

defense of his ghazal shows the complicated "web of tellings" woven into a poetic

defense as he read verse at a mushaʿirah about a verse recited at a mushaʿirah. Sauda's

lambast of Nudrat, whom he called a "pimp of doggerel," was similarly self-referential,

507

but he used the musha‘irah space to show off his ability to write bilingual *tazmīn*s or quotations based off of his competitor's lines.

Ending with Sauda's recitation at the graveside is significant in the context of Urdu becoming a cosmopolitan vernacular. Significantly, Mir Taqi Mir, Mir Hasan, and Gardezi in their tazkirahs written in the late 1740s remember Bedil as an Urdu or *Rekhtah* poet; they each give the same example of an infectious verse said to be by him.[189] From the perspective of Bedil as a vernacular poet in the cultural sense, the *‘urs* musha‘irah becomes a socio-literary setting where boundaries between linguistic, religious, and economic spheres appear to have been blurred to produce a localized version of Persian literary cosmopolitanism. In the spirit of the *tāzah-goʾī* aesthetic which sought to make things new by looking to the past, Bedil's grave was the new polestar marking Delhi as the rightful geographic and cultural capital of the Persian cosmopolis.

189

Don't ask about matters of the heart, what good is a heart, I'm here!
What fruit is to be had from an untraceable seed, I'm here.

مت پوچھ دل کی باتیں وہ دل کہاں ہے ہم ہیں
اس تخم بے‌نشاں کا حاصل کہاں ہے ہم ہیں

When love comes calling at the heart's threshold in this manner,
From the curtain the Beloved said, "Where is Bedil? I'm here!"

جب دل کے آستاں پر عشق آن کر پکارا
پردے سے یار بولا بیدل کہاں ہے ہم ہیں

Writing about "literacy aware" societies in Medieval Europe, Steven Mullaney employs Mikhael Bakhtin's ideas from *Rabelais and his World* to note that "the vernacular was not a fixed linguistic system" but a "crossroads" for the intersection of many languages and with them their socio-cultural baggages (1995:78). Bedil's grave embodied this vernacular crossroads during the mid-1700s when an Indic language rerouted the values, affects, and epistemologies of the Persian cosmopolis. The history of how Bedil became a localized saint according to the Persophone lexicon of worshiping poets illustrates the social processes of vernacularization. It is fitting to refocus Persian's axis mundi into Delhi on the grave of a *tāzah-goʾī* Persian-language poet who was also revered as an Urdu writer when India was so central to early modern Persian literary culture.

His graveside gatherings point to a cultural process of vernacularization of which contemporary historical tellings only present a sliver. The mischievousness and narrative frames employed by tazkirah writers and poets is a point we must briefly dwell on. Tazkirahs have been accused of all kinds of failures by previous historians, but of late there are scholars resurrecting the tazkirah's role through more critical analysis. Notably Stefano Pellò states:

The early modern Persian tazkira can be thought of as an attempt to catalogue and archive, in a narrative-fictional way, specific individual personalities and the internal dynamics of the Persian-writing poetic community, and thus to describe (in terms that are also prescriptive) its protocols with regards to poetic education, poetic production, reception and criticism. In other words, the genre of literary tazkiras can be understood as a kind of autobiography, or even better auto-hagiography, of Persian literature by its own protagonists. (2009)

This elucidation has only one point that I would like to draw out here. In particular, Pellò calling tazkirah representation a "narrative-fictional" mode deserves to be examined more closely.

I would argue that the way in which tazkirah writers chronicle certain mushaʿirah anecdotes is not fictional at all. Theirs is an aesthetic intervention that aims to provide readers a realistic idea of how and why a poem is recited because literature during the 1700s was more of a social and communicative practice. As mentioned before, poems like this posses more lyrical merit and have a stronger aesthetic appeal when we as readers know the context in which they were recited or sung. This narrative strategy mirrors the quotidian nature of literature as something social within the Mughal literary sphere. Couplets and quatrains were intertextual with the contexts in which reciters deployed them as verses served to shade meaning or highlight an irony. All the mushaʿirah anecdotes advertise this narrative strategy foremost because

510

they generate delight. Yet, this enjoyment is founded on a sense of familiarity not just with lyricism or lyrical conventions, but with an intimacy of the way literature had a social life for the Mughal public sphere. This is very significant because it captures a rather novel notion of literary realism supported by lyric poetry. Specifically, mushaʿirah depictions' meter, rhyme, and narrative actually tell us more about the event than the aesthetically pleasing but misguided imaginary ethnographic depictions —this was something we saw in Chapter Two with Mir's tazkirah and his disdain for the poet ʿAjiz whom he called a catamite.

We have to remember Pellò's point that tazkirah texts form a "web of tellings," a complex lore of literary and social history. Rather than divest this cultural realm from the literary realm, we ought to bring the literary universe of the ghazal into the mushaʿirah circle as a social institution in the the late Mughal public sphere. The prophetic aspect of literary playfulness was a social norm in 18th-century poetry circles on many levels of the Mughal polity, a society with a wide variety of literary practitioners. These meta-discursive verses reveal the true nature of recited verse for the late Mughal era public sphere in that they are enacting lyricism as something tangible. The compendium anecdote chronicling mushaʿirah rhetoric weds the lyrical

and the social aspects of 18th-century Persophone literary practice and thereby illustrates a uniquely Mughal sentiments on public aesthetics. In turn, I understand the mushaʿirah as not just a socio-literary institution but also as an oral historical mode of representation tangibly bound to a debated understanding of literary style and social critique. Poets recite and debate to connect themselves with a shared and contestable literary past that prizes uttered verse over poems on the written page. Reciting or singing metered verse materializes this language history and recitation connects the materiality of poetic language with public space.

At moments like this it becomes productive to understand Persian literature through the lens of Urdu. That is, Urdu's moment as a vernacular language on par with Persian reframes the social history of literary production in late-Mughal India. As Pellò again points out, the tazkirah tradition in North India allows for us to read in an almost archeological fashion for the habits and assumptions made by literary practitioners in representing themselves and their colleagues. I quote him in length:

> The *parole* of Indo-Persian poetic circles cannot be represented as such within the textual space of the tazkira but can—and must—be invoked through its projection onto the *langue* of Persian poetic culture. Vernacularity is not absent but hidden and works like an sub-text, continuously evoked by "subtitled" Hindi vocabulary and the oral realm of the localized tellings and gossip, once again "dubbed" in Persian. (2009: 20)

512

Pellò's point is well taken. In his semiotic configuration of the tazkirah's localized tendency, the linguistic aspect of the vernacular has to be sifted from prose writers' Persian. Yet, from a social perspective, the subtext of vernacular sensibilities in Persian tazkirahs is not so deep. Using Bedil's graveside mushaʿirah as an example, as I did in this chapter, tazkirah representations of vernacular cultural are plain as day. Students of Urdu literature never doubt the impact of Persian on Indian lyrical sensibilities, but it is still novel to imagine Urdu, *Rekhtah*, *Hindavī*, or any other South Asian vernacular shifting Persian's literary course. Clearly the languages and their vernacular cultures did just that at Bedil's graveside mushaʿirahs.

It's perhaps no surprise Bedil's role in Urdu poetry became more veiled since his posthumous salons ended. By 1784 Bedil's grave had fallen into disrepair. Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi (d. 1824) visited the sepulcher before he left Delhi for the east and he found the tomb still situated in the courtyard of Bedil's former residence but it was in ruins (Mus'hafi 2001: 25). It seems the ʿurs mushaʿirah was no longer maintained, the *kullīyāt* in Bedil's hand was lost, Muhammad Saʾid no longer hocked snake oils there, and Khan-i Arzu's friends no longer served hot food to the poor. As for the heavy

wooden staff and Bedil's sword, those too had long vanished. Those forty years of Delhi

celebrating Bedil's death anniversary with graveside recitation passed by quickly.

As for the grave itself, Mus'hafi was the last one to report actually seeing it.[190] At

this point Bedil's resting place becomes cryptic and poets can only make pilgrimages to

it in verse. Asad Allah Khan Ghalib (1797-1869), who had been an avid reader of Bedil's

writings in his youth, makes it sound like Bedil's grave had all but disappeared by 1813:

<div dir="rtl">

گر ملے حضرت بیدل کا خط لوح مزار

اسد آئینۂ پرواز معانی مانگے

</div>

If the writing on the tablet of the tomb of Hazrat Bedil would be available
Asad would demand the mirror of the veil/flight of meanings.[191]

Curiously, Bedil had first written under the name *Ramzī* meaning "cryptic or

allegorical." Upon reading the following lines from Saʿdi's *Gulistān,* he changed his pen

name to *Bedil* or "heartless," meaning someone with their heart torn out by the

Beloved:

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[190] As late as 2007 it seems Bedil's grave was still a topic of concern for Delhi's residents. The journalist Sandeep Dougal tried to get more information on how the grave was rediscovered, citing Ghani's book *Rūh-i Bedil*, a Wikipedia article, and several personal communications with C.M. Naim and Rajeev Kinra. Dougal also interviewed Khwajah Hasan Sani Nizami whose father Khwajah Hasan Nizami "rediscovered" Bedil's tomb and encouraged the Nizam of Hyderabad to rebuild it. Dougal reaches the same conclusion that others do: the tomb rebuilt near the Old Fort by *Pragatī Maidān* is not Bedil's grave (Dougal 2007).

[191] Parwaz could also mean "veil" and would work quite well in the translation. Bedil's dates and chronogram on his grave stone have been worn away by the weather and are veiled in the stone.

گر کسی وصف او ز من پرسد
بیدل از بی نشان چه گوید باز

عاشقان کشتگان معشوقند
بر نیاید ز کشتگان آواز

If someone were to ask me for his description,
With heart torn out for someone who's not there, what is there to respond?

It's the Lovers who are the Beloved's victims.
You won't hear a peep from the slaughtered!

Mirza Sangin Beg was compiling a cultural geography of Delhi called *Sair al-Manāzil* (c.

1820), when he heard rumors about Bedil's grave outside of Delhi Gate. Though he

found no trace of it, people still quoted the inscription on Bedil's headstone:

پیش از این گفت سعدی شیراز
بیدل از بی نشان چه گوید باز

In former times, Saʿdi of Shiraz said,
"Bedil is a John Doe, how can he answer?" (Mirza Sangin Beg 1980: 119)

Conclusion

This project began as an ethnographic venture focusing on the contemporary mushaʿirah. I spent nearly three years in Uttar Pradesh, traveling to small towns, attending their mushaʿirahs, and talking with people involved in them. After learning about my interests, local poets, patrons, and listeners began to share with me their collections of locally produced pamphlets and souvenirs documenting gatherings dating back to the early 20th century. Because of these interactions, the mushaʿirah's history became just as interesting to me as the contemporary moment that I had set out to study. Yet I found only limited scholarship on the historical background of this institution. Instead, there was disappointingly little scholarly connection between the culture I had witnessed in the field and the historical setting which I hoped would frame an introduction to my fieldwork.

To remedy this, I began poking around tazkirahs. Here I found anecdotes and commentaries that were not accounted for in previous scholarship. Soon my collection of these anecdotes grew and I began to draw links across texts and time periods, between poets and patrons, and among mushaʿirah participants and the poetry itself.

Through this work, I found that since 1719 the there has been a continuous cultivation and documentation of the modern Urdu mushaʿirah as a semi-public literary institution. Although the mushaʿirah's modes of representation have changed radically since the 1700s, I found surprising trends linking the impetus to record recited poetry at the moment of utterance. These trends linked poetry recitation across space and time, whether accomplished by 1700s poets using a *kitāb-i mushaʿirah*, as we saw in Chapter Two, or madrasah students raising up cell phones to shoot present day recitations. Likewise, although the form of the mushaʿirah itself has changed radically since the the 1700s, I found a similar discursive or communicative intent in the act of orally circulating literary knowledge among a group of reciters and listeners across different time periods.

When the Urdu mushaʿirah is examined along with the Persian literary gatherings that were in full swing during the first half of the 1700s, a unique story emerges about a vernacular literary sphere as told through mushaʿirah anecdotes and verse samples. The time I spend hanging around poets in Muslim India guided how I dug up these anecdotes. Similarly, lessons from the tea-drinkers and bazaar prophets

that I met in Muzaffarnagar directed my reading of tazkirahs in search of values that I learned from them.

In this regard, the same concerns contemporary *mufassal* poets had about recited verse's originality, levity, and capacity to communicate ironic and sagacious ideas can be found in the way tazkirah writers depicted mushaʿirahs throughout the 1700s. Mushaʿirah verse and anecdotes as represented in tazkirahs place a high cultural value on honesty, humor, exaggeration, delight, and originality. These values mark texts that existed simultaneously in both the oral and written realms. An ethnographic and socio-historical approach to public literary institutions over the *longue durée* shows us something of a given cosmopolis' social life based on the circulatory and communicative approaches of its participants. The aural realm of recitation and its associated cultural practices, like delivering verse at gravesides, drinking coffee, smoking water pipes, and consorting with attractive beloveds, all have tangible implications for understanding lyric poetry more critically. Similarly, peripheral textual practices such as diaries, anthologies, and now mass mediated technologies demonstrate the interconnectedness of economic processes and aesthetic practices directly influencing certain poetic genres like the ghazal in particular. In short, the

518

historical mushaʿirah shows us material aspects of literature as a social process. When understanding literature as a practice, a social space emerges in which reality is made to conform with the values and mores of the Persian/Urdu lyrical universe. As demonstrated by the history captured in this project, when a society of listeners and reciters is bound by the mutuality of exchanging verse, their recitations harmonize into psalms' melodies, the smell of coffee becomes the Lover's burning liver, and the Beloved soon materializes in the gathering space, waiting to be propositioned.

Chapter Overview

The mushaʿirah encompasses a thriving and vital Urdu literary sphere that stretches across the so-called "Hindi heartland," giving voice to populist Muslim political ideologies and circulating lyric verse. Yet, scholarship on Urdu literature or the history of Muslim South Asia only provides hints about how this mushaʿirah-based literary sphere actually functioned and propagated itself across time. What were its values? How did humor and entertainment fit in? What was the relationship between debate or conversation in the mushaʿirah and the instantiation of literature later in poets' *dīwān*s? What were the historical modes of circulation? How were events remembered? These were some of my questions after witnessing local poets engaged in

building modes of belonging in mushaʿirahs and their ancillary institutions like tea stalls and cigarette stands.

This project focuses on the 1700s to interrogate the mushaʿirah's social norms and aesthetic values as Persian and Urdu language poets employed the mushaʿirah as an institution to circulate literary knowledge. The institutionalization of reading poetry aloud formed a literary discursive realm in Mughal society for Persian lyric poetry as part of a literary totality stretching from the Basphorus in the west to well past Bukhara in the east. It was a unique epoch marking a time when Mughal India was still the center of Persian literary production and criticism for the "fresh-speaking" poets who were also writing poetry in a Persianized vernacular that would soon outpace its cultural forerunner. Using literary, historical, and ethnographic approaches, I examine mushaʿirah anecdotes and records from over fifty literary compendia (*tazkirah*s) complied between 1690-1810. These sources tell us that Urdu and Persian language communities used the mushaʿirah outside of the Mughal court to enact a material form of literary sociability tapping into linguistic, sensual, and historical modes of belonging.

While having roots in pre-Islamic Arabia, the mushaʿirah in the Subcontinent owes its origins to a form of Persian literary sociability that connected South Asia with

philosophical and cultural strands reaching into central and western Asia. Its three centuries of cultivation since the early modern era have rightly led historians to view the mushaʿirah as a social fact for the patronage, development, and spread of literary values and aesthetics. While some of the surface-level pronouncements about the mushaʿirah's competitive spirit and instructional ethos hold, in the late 19th and early 20th century images of the mushaʿirah fall prey to a modernist nostalgia mourning the end of Mughal cultural institutions enshrined in both scholarly and popular accounts. In response, the present study examines poets' anecdotal and poetic material from the "long 18th century" which paints vivid and contrasting picture of how poets exchanged verse at a time when India was at the center of Persian literature and criticism. This context reveals how the mushaʿirah even today operates as a living remnant of a pre-colonial Mughal sphere. This mushaʿirah historiography lays the groundwork for understanding lyricism as a civil construct. The recitational space of the mushaʿirah provides us a better understanding of the ambivalent subjectivity of ghazal poetry in its immediacy as a site of a South Asian Muslim habitus informed by Persian literary humanism.

Over this dissertation's five chapters, I examine the imitation, debate, manners, sensuality, and history of the mushaʿirah that the 1700s tazkirahs sought to document through anecdotes and the verse of poets who recited in mushaʿirahs. Beginning with imaginary tellings in the 1690s and before, this project framed the larger literary sphere for Persophone writers over the 18th century while focusing on how these larger cultural trends played out in the specificity of the literary gathering's social setting. The work ends with a detailed look at one of the longest running and widely attended mushaʿirahs in the 1700s at the grave of Persian language poet ʿAbd al-Qadir Bedil, who is actually remembered as an Urdu poet for one verse that is credited to him. Using material from across this span, I show how literary tazkirahs reflect specific modes of narrativity, historiography, and lyrical intertextuality which were able to capture the immediacy of institutionalized verse recitation in terms most important to the mushaʿirah practitioners themselves: the poets, listeners, and patrons. For late-Mughal India at the heart of the Persian world, the mushaʿirah represented a literary practice and mode of belonging in a society of listeners and reciters intimately connected with the Persian language cosmopolis.

Given the dominance that Farhat Allah Beg's *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Shamaʿ* has in our understanding of the mushaʿirah, the first chapter examines how imaginary mushaʿirahs took hold of poets in the 1700s. Tazkirah writers and critics used the mushaʿirah as a stage upon which to understand the social concerns of style, originality, and imitation as prized in the Persian literary sphere of the day. From this vantage, it becomes apparent that many of the concerns poets had about "fresh-speaking" aesthetic in the 1600s took on new life as tazkirah writers retold anecdotes, using old verses, stories, and jokes to chart new lyrical territory. Interestingly, the verse itself in some of these anecdotes was made to appear "mushaʿirah-like" as writers made it fit within the communicative and formal conventions dictating competitive verse. The second part of Chapter One focused on how imaginary or "deferred gatherings" were actualized when examined through formal social and poetic conventions. In particular, the "absentee mushaʿirah" between Nasir ʿAli and Saʾib illustrates this tendency and provides us a framework for understanding how imitative variation functions within the mushaʿirah space.

Chapter Two analyzes the debate of verse's literary and aesthetic values within the mushaʿirah. Here, I examined the intimacy of plagiarism as a social disease shared

by all reciters and writers. Since plagiarism was an overdetermined and ambivalently experienced violation in the literary sphere of the time, other poets were eager to use the pretext of poor mushaʿirah conduct to skewer a competitor's verse and reputation. This context helped set a mood for the generous rivalry that prevails in the mushaʿirah space. Conversely, the imitative paradigms of Persian and Urdu literatures also allow for bound friendships as defined by the shared experience of constructing verse together in parallel meters and rhymes. The Urdu tazkirah writers show this quality in the way that they implicitly chronicle gatherings in their pocket diaries or *buyuz.* This could be seen first in Hatim's edited *Dīwān-zādah* and later in Mir Taqi Mir's work in which parallel verses tell different stories than the ones advertised in prose. At the end of this historical analysis, I closely examine Ghulam Hamdani Mus'hafi's social sphere in the mushaʿirahs he led in Lucknow which allows for a reconstruction of the mushaʿirah circles he propagated amongst his students and patrons.

The third chapter picks up on the deliciousness of mushaʿirah discord and competition by examining how decorum was to be erected and then knocked down. Anecdotes cover instances where unruly tongues and difficult behavior made for a more enlivening mushaʿirah experience. Tazkirah writers prized a more permissive

vision of mushaʿirah decorum as the poets used behavior and witty comments to entertain each other. In the context of fractious debates on themes in mushaʿirah, we see how poets' reputations were formed through rumors of poor mushaʿirah conduct. In particular, writers would often document visiting Hazin, a poet who earned a reputation as a crank because of rumors about rude comments he made in mushaʿirahs. With this focus on decorum, we also see that intoxicants and stimulants helped to fuel the mushaʿirah's form of literary sociability. These consumable products add a third sensual element to poets' ability to create belonging in recitation through, for example, sharing coffee and reciting in coffeehouses. In this regard, we see how public space could become a setting for mushaʿirahs beyond the private or semi-private salon where mushaʿirahs were often held.

In line with discussions on intoxicants' sensuality, the fourth chapter specifically examines the voice and eroticism in the mushaʿirah context. Reassessing popular understandings of sung verse in the mushaʿirah, the first part of Chapter Four concentrates on how tazkirah writers represented verse-singing in musical terms. Unlettered poets sang the psalm-like melodies of Persian lyrical conventions to the very musical notes defined as Davidian according to Persian musical sciences. From

here it is possible to understand how melody has an appetitive quality in the musha'irah in its ability to intoxicate, especially when coupled with the actual drugs themselves. The presence of *qawwāls* and professional beloveds in some gatherings complicates the hierarchical and erotic relationship between semi-elite male poets and public performers who often had a shared interest in the musical and poetic aspects of sung and recited speech. Lastly, this chapter examines specific relationships that were rumored to have come out of musha'irah-based forms of erotic sociability. In particular, I analyze how the relationship of Ummid and Sadarang was of particular importance as they both sang in psalm-like tones, according to contemporary writers, and embodied appropriate forms of public sociability to be cast as paragons of male erotic and musical connections.

The final chapter has aimed to bring approaches from each of the previous sections to examine a grounded and specific example of one of the most famous musha'irahs of the middle 1700s. The *'urs* of Bedil hosted a poets' gathering every year in which reciters sought to create legitimating connections in verse and social belonging to an axis mundi of the *tāzah-go'ī* cosmopolis by reciting their own compositions and performing bibliomancy. Because of the institution's cultural capital

in Delhi's literary and public sphere, the posthumous musha'irah at Bedil's grave provides an engaging example through which it becomes possible to understand the complexity of the musha'irah's form of popular sociability during the 1700s. In many ways, Bedil's musha'irah and Bedil himself as a cultural arbiter frame each of the previous chapters. While Arzu was instrumental in organizing the graveside festivities, it was Bedil's expansive approach to literary sociability which set the tone for Delhi's literary sphere for years to come. Bedil's expansiveness may have influenced Arzu's critical language and social projects. The gravesite hosted contentious debates on vernacular poetry and Persian stylistic conventions, arguments that were documented in critical prose works of the time. The decorum practiced at Bedil's grave encouraged a wide variety of its participants to revere him within Persian cultural conventions on poets, prophets, and their graves as notable sites of intercession through verse recitation. Lastly, the grave itself signified a sensual or material history through its connection to other shrines within Delhi. As seen in contemporary travelogue writing, Bedil's shrine was known as a place to scatter rose petals, to light candles, and to buy the medicines made in accordance with Bedil's formulas that his cousin sold for a time in the compound. As one of the more documented examples of 18th-century

mushaʿirahs, Bedil's posthumous mushaʿirah provides a lens through which to concretely analyze the ways that vernacular Indo-Persian conceptions of imitation, debate, decorum, sensuality and literary history bear upon the mushaʿirah as a mode of literary practice over the 18th-century.

Contribution

The main contribution I make through this project is to begin understanding literary history and criticism through both ethnographic and literary perspectives. In particular, since this project concentrates on a social institution for communicating literary knowledge, I have advocated using poetry as a category of evidence. That is, literature in the mushaʿirah shows us how not just language, but specifically poetic language indexing a universe of complex lyrical conventions, structures modes of belonging according to the spatial and decorous demands of mushaʿirah sociability. The mushaʿirah's sociability is formed by a "literature-world" "whose boundaries and operational laws are not reducible to those of ordinary political space," (Casanova 2004: xii) but whose tropes and conventions still have implications for the Mughal public sphere. In this regard, the mushaʿirah is a unique site for reshaping how we understand

528

the pre-colonial public sphere in a way that could potentially reformulate our

understanding of literary spheres in general.

Recent literary scholarship has attempted to "clarify the problems attendant on

the conception of a literary precursor sphere and at the same time [...] suggest how

exactly Habermas' analysis now preoccupies literary scholars and cultural

historians" (Loewenstein and Stevens 2004: 204). Such approaches have framed

literature's aesthetic abilities to intervene in public life by focusing on music, salons,

the discursive qualities of literature, and popular culture (Pasco 2004; Eastwood 2007;

Young 2009; Tony 2010; Ford 2013; Miyamoto 2013). Yet, much of this scholarship has

remained myopically European-focused. In South Asian literary history, there has been

a variant emphasis on the literary cosmopolis as defined by Sheldon Pollock as a

literary totality which "was all about defining and preserving moral and social order,

but without privileging any particular religious or ethnic community" (Pollock 2006;

Eaton 2013). This approach allows for a more heterogenous vision of literary culture to

emerge in dialogue with the cosmopolis' unified definitions of society and moral order

through discourses on belonging, good kingship, and justice for commoners. Yet, much

of this scholarship has been reluctant to examine everyday forms of literary practice, instead focusing on court-based literary circulation (Busch 2009; Sharma 2009b, a).[192]

The current project has combined these approaches in order to complicate European-centered notions of literature as a form of discourse and to refocus our view of the cosmopolis onto more popular forms of literary sociability. That is not to say the musha'irah was a popular institution, for in this work its only true public incarnation was in the example given at Bedil's grave and the hints we get of verse being sung in the markets. I am simply pressing the point that musha'irahs during this time period that were organized outside the court were not as elite as previously imagined.

To accomplish this task, I have grounded my understanding of literature as a human-centered social practice with qualitatively measurable standards. This approach has been favored by scholars focusing on poetry in Arab societies that use literary values to mediate social experience (Caton 1990; Abu-Lughod 1999; Miller 2005; Ali 2010), a methodological basis that states by "attend[ing] closely to the textual and aesthetic conditions of [poetic] authorship, anthropologists [can] understand habits of

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[192] Rajeev Kinra's work is a notable exception to this when he examines the literary and historiographic contribution of the *munshī* Chandar Bhan Brahmin. While Chandar Bhan was patronized by the Mughal royalty, he made intriguing contributions to the court and to the literary sphere based on a complicated notion of publicness (Subrahmanyam 1995; Kinra 2008).

moral reflection whose nuances and power for people can be located culturally, in the symbolic practices of specific communities" (Miller 2005: 84). The Urdu literary sphere provides an engaging new terrain for understanding the social aspect of South Asian Muslims poetic practices on several fronts. Thus, in this study we examined the historical basis for a vernacular aspect of the Persian cosmopolis where the mushaʿirah's texts and anecdotes show us some of the "habits of moral reflection" for late-Mughal society (ibid.). By understanding this historical basis, future study of the later and even contemporary forms of mushaʿirah sociability will be better informed. That is, by understanding the mushaʿirah as an institution which materializes literary aesthetics through a grounded form of social praxis, we can move beyond recent popular critiques of the mushaʿirah as simply a venue for circulating bad verse.[193]

Additionally, my approach to literature as a social practice allows for a more cosmopolitan, multilingual analysis of the 1700s Mughal literary sphere. In the case of Persian literature, Mughal and Safavid poets have been neglected. In the case of Urdu, scholars have avoided using a more comparative framework that looks at the period as

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[193] Sadly, this narrow view was recently echoed by an American academic who took pity on me for studying contemporary mushaʿirah verse.

a whole.[194] By attending to the "textual and aesthetic conditions of poetic authorship"

we see that the division between Urdu and Persian during the 1700s was not as sharp as

previously imagined. In this regard, this study is one of the first that covers the literary

history of late *tāzah-goʾī* poets like Bedil, Nasir ʿAli, and Hazin, poets who had a

documentable impact on Urdu writing into the early 20th century.[195] From my point of

view, 1700s Urdu literature and much of what came after cannot be fully understood

without knowing the stylistic and aesthetic concerns of the *tāzah-goʾī* poets who had a

clear social impact on the earliest documentable forms of Urdu's literary sociability. As

documented in evidence from the above text, Bedil was revered in the pantheon of

Urdu literature's ancestors, a quality which can clearly be seen in Mir Taqi's and Mir

Hasan's tazkirahs written during the height of Bedil's yearly posthumous mushaʿirahs.

The tazkirah vision of this annual paradigmatic event clearly shows the socio-cultural

routes of vernacularization within the South Asian cosmopolis.

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[194] Sean Pue's recent work is a notable exception to this. His focus is the 20th century (Pue 2014). While Arthur Dudney's recent dissertation concentrates solely on Arzu's contribution to contemporary language epistemes and aesthetics, his future work may have a more comparative focus on literature over the 18th century (Dudney 2013).

[195] While scholars point to Bedil's influence on Ghalib there has been no examination of the actual stylistic strands connecting the work of these two poets. Additionally, Akbar Allahabadi had an abiding interest in Nasir ʿAli's work to the point of quoting lines of his in several macaronic *tazmīns*.

In future work I will apply this project's critically informed understanding of literature as a social practice to analyze how Urdu and Persian lyrical poetry in general are governed by similarly complex and ambiguous social notions of entertainment, ethics, originality, and delight. Interestingly, the tazkirah mode of historiography, though penned by the literary elite, was better able to handle traces of popular sentiment in ways that contemporary discussions of Urdu poetry have not adequately covered. In part, tazkirah modes of storytelling are able to accomplish this by their cosmopolitan narrative modes of relating anecdotes and verse which put no hierarchy on discourse. In other words, the "ecumene" of the mushaʿirah legitimates humor and delight in all its forms when uttered among a society of reciters and listeners eager to be entertained. As recent scholarship attests, tazkirahs offer a social view of Persian-based lyricism being enjoyed, debated, and circulated among a community that realizes the "literature-world" where Lovers' internal organs are burned up by the flaming arrows loosed by the Beloveds' mere glances.

Lyricism, a difficult term to define, is slowly becoming an object of renewed critical inquiry in scholarship on modern South Asia. Urdu poetry has been examined as a literary-historical register which addresses the complexity of Muslim self-hood in

533

relation to Indian modernity where the lyric exemplifies the ambivalent relationship between nationalist discourses on citizenship and the role of Muslim identity within various South Asian nationalisms (Mufti 2004). So too has scholarship used the ambiguity prized in Urdu and Persian literatures to gird, as Pue points out, Gayatri Spivak's idea of the of the "position without identity" whereby stagnate epistemologies on progressivism, imperialism, and post-colonial nationalism can be more readily critiqued from an "ephemeral" position that does not prize a geographic focus on a homeland (Spivak 2009; Pue 2012, 2014).

These critical perspectives on lyricism hint at the ways in which Persian and Urdu literatures can be understood as proffering a social critique. In this work, I show how these critical approaches to lyricism can be taken further by focusing on public modes of literary enjoyment. These popular or entertaining realms are generally ignored in mainstream and canonical critical examinations of lyric poetry. Since tazkirahs reflect, in a way, insiders' views of literary belonging, they posses the possibility for displaying something like public discourse, touching on popular traditions and their propagators. I demonstrate this first in the initial chapter where I examined the narrative trope of imaginary mushaʿirahs as a framing device for critical

modes of literary historiography in 1700s tazkirahs. Furthermore, in many of the

anecdotes I analyzed throughout the work I have shown a congruence between the

prose prefacing an exchange of verse and the poetry itself. This mode of telling stories

about poetry shows tazkirahs' unified narrative impulse to memorialize and entertain

its readership, usually other poets, with the paradigmatic quality of literary excellence

in all its forms.

A tazkirah-based understanding of lyricism has the possibility to reframe the

aesthetic and critical impulses of the studies examining modern literature mentioned

above. By shying away from modes of representation that assign hierarchies to

discursive processes, performative or mass mediated literatures can have social

relevance to literary criticism. Additionally, a revamped understanding of the tazkirah

in relation to public modes of debate and circulation is able to create a more

heterogenous canon. In fact, the tazkirahs themselves have already done this through

their variations and incomplete narrations. Conversely, we see that these supposed

weaknesses for which they had been denigrated are in fact boons to writing an

ambiguous history of the ghazal. Hence, this study has favored the mushaʿirah and the

tazkirah as twin institutions that circulate a particular form of literary knowledge—in

short lyric poetry or perhaps more generally the aesthetic aspects of lyricism. The crux

of the mushaʿirah's particular literary aesthetic relies on participants developing

meaning within a set of bound tropes which are deployed to promote ambiguity, a

focusing aesthetic in the 1700s literary sphere. In effect, the mushaʿirah both

institutionally and discursively realizes the very ambiguous aesthetics of Persian and

Urdu literatures. I have shown this in examples in which the social setting of the

mushaʿirah mirrors the ghazal universe. This is seen in parallel verses of the deferred

gatherings (Chapter One), and verses which call attention to their own recitation

(Chapters Two and Five). This can also be witnessed when poets align their

comportment and consumables with the lyric universe's sensual aspects like coffee's

scent indexing the Lover's burning liver or poets' recitations recalling David's psalms

(Chapters Three and Four). Of course, poets themselves often become the paradigmatic

Lover in poetry gatherings (Chapter Four and Five). With this socially defined idea of

lyricism in mind, we see that the mushaʿirah is an institution dedicated to the

circulation of ambiguity itself.

My future work as will continue to bridge the aesthetic concerns of South Asian

literary criticism (Pritchett 1994; Hyder 2006; Pue 2014) with the cultural concerns of

historical anthropology (Greenblatt 1980; Amin 1995; Ginzburg 1999; Burke 2004, 2006), a position that has undergirded my approach from the beginning. This is precisely what a study of a literary public sphere calls for as "the sociology and economics of literary practice needs to cross-fertilized by a more rigorous attempt to integrate that knowledge with our more traditional knowledge of the transformation of literary modes and genres" (Loewenstein 2004: 204). Since the vernacular mushaʿirah is documented in tazkirahs, *guldastahs,* pamphlets, newspapers, cassette tapes, DVDs, and now YouTube over the course of it 300-year history, it provides a unique case for understanding how ambiguity as an aesthetic circulates. Studying the mushaʿirah grounds a scholarly approach to the mechanics of literary communication which I began here in my examination of 1700s tazkirahs, and shows the path for future studies also interested in understanding the role of literary sociability in routing genres, texts, and aesthetic paradigms among a reading community.

Notably, the mushaʿirah 's history is able to help conceptualize popular literary and performed poetic traditions that do not easily fit within canonical or genre-based examinations of South Asian cultural practice. Chapter Three in the present study began tracing a portion of this genealogy by looking at the way in which mushaʿirahs

intersected with popular singers' circles of influence. In South Asian Muslim culture

the boundary between the Sufi and the poet is often blurred in shrines, hagiographic

literatures, and local folklore. As witnessed in this project, tazkirah writers wrote with a

familiarity about and with *qawwāl*s, showing how at the textual and poetic levels their

abiding interest in performative textual practices were highly congruent. The historical

record in this case confirms some of the lore about the shared socio-literary and

performative interests of Sufi singers and poets. The few "*qawwālī*" texts examined here

would be interesting to trace in fieldwork with current popular singers, showing how a

genealogy of performed texts in the popular setting can further shape our

understanding of ancillary literary cultures' histories.[196]

My future work will refocus on the contemporary musha'irah scene with a more

informed understanding of the relationship between circulation and literary aesthetics.

Based on my previous work and on early modern textual practices, I am in a unique

position to formulate a study of the ghazal over the *longue durée* as a social mode of

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[196] It should be noted that of the period writers only Dargah Quli Khan uses the word in reference to the Sufi Khwajah Basit being adept at composing in the art of *qawwālī*. As discussed in Katherine Butler Schofield's work, there are social and aesthetic links between the court singers or *kalāwants* and *qawwāl*s through marriage and through the *khayāl* style of singing (Schofield 2013). Given poets' interests in *khayāl* singing itself, Indian music's historical sources clearly show themselves to be a viable source for literary history.

Indo-Muslim literary practice. Through accessing the growing archive of mushaʿirah

recitations on YouTube, collections I have amassed from local archives in rural Uttar

Pradesh, and further study of Urdu poetry's ancillary and pulp textual practices, I will

be able to chart an ambiguous history of public verse that focuses on alternative moral

understandings of belonging or filiation as informed by shared literary experiences.

The urge to document recited verse or public poetry has endured across the

mushaʿirah's vernacular history. The tazkirah and the *bayāz* were initial instruments for

facilitating this in the hands of literature's practitioners: the poets, patrons, and

listeners. So too are YouTube and the multimedia cellphones that now circulate literary

sensibilities and structure sociability. In short, the 1700s mushaʿirah scene and the

continued popularity of mass mediated recitation make it clear that the ghazal

demands a growing audience.

Appendices

Appendix A: Dehkhuda's Definitions of the Mushaʿirah

مشاعرة [مُ عَ رَ] (ع مص) نبرد کردن به شعر با هم . (از منتهی الارب) (آنندراج) (از ناظم الاطباء) (از اقرب الموارد). با کسی به شعر نبرد کردن . (تاج المصادر بیهقی) (زوزنی) (یادداشت به خط مرحوم دهخدا) (مجمل اللغة). با هم شعر خواندن . (غیاث). با یکدیگر شعر خواندن تا که بیشتر داند. (یادداشت به خط مرحوم دهخدا). ج ، مشاعرات . (فرهنگ فارسی معین).

Mushāʿirah (noun): 1. To battle together through verse. (from *Muntahī al-Arb*) ([from *Farhang-i] Ānandrāj*) (from *[Farhang-i] Nāzim al-Atabā*) (from *Aqrab al-Mawārid*); 2. To contest someone in poetry (*[from] Tāj al-Masādar Behaqī*) (from the late Dekhuda's written note) ([from] *Mujamal al-Lughah*); 3. To recite poetry together ([from] *Ghiyās [al-Lughat]*); 4. To recite poetry with one another to find the greater [poet] (from the late Dekhuda's written note). 5. Plural, mushāʿirāt ([from] *Farhang-i Fārsī Maʿīn*).

مشاعرات [مُ عَ] (ع اِ) جِ مشاعرة (فرهنگ فارسی معین) : مشاعرات او با استاد ابوبکر خوارزمی مشهور و در یتیمة الدهر مستوفی ذکر آورده .

Mushāʿirāt (plural noun): 1. The plural of mushaʿirah ([from] *Farhang-i Fārsī Maʿīn*); 2. The famous poetry symposia with Ustad Abu Bakr Khawarizmi mentioned in the account *Yatīmat al-Dahr.*

مشاعره کردن [مُ عَ / عِ رَ / رِ کَ دَ] (مص مرکب) نبرد کردن در شعر.(ناظم الاطباء). مسابقه در شعر خواندن از بر.

Mushāʿirah Kardan (compound verb): 1. To battle in verse (from *[Farhang-i] Nāzim al-Atabā*); 2. A competition of memorized poetry recitation.

Appendix B: A Gathering at the Wazir Khan Mosque in Lahore

Hakim Lahori heard the following anecdote from his teacher Faqir Allah Afrin:

> I remember that Shah Afrin once told me that a crowd of the cultivated class was holding a literary gathering situated in the mosque of the former wazir of Lahore and they were stoking a heated literary debate. That day Mulla Muhammad Saʿid Eʿjaz Akbarabadi (d. 1705), who had just newly arrived into the city of Lahore [from Delhi], objected to these lines of Nasir ʿAli [Sirhindi]:

> صریر خامه می دانم که با طبعت نمی سازد
> دریدی نامه دل صد صد پاره شد قاصد رسید اینجا

> I understand the pen's scratching for it would not make an impression on you
> You tore up the letter, the heart became one hundred pieces, the postman arrived here.

> [saying that], "the scratching of the pen when the lover writes from a far off place never delights him. The sound of the letter tearing, which is more playful than the scratching of a pen, was what made an impression on him." Shah Afrin said, "It wasn't the Beloved that was impressed." Eʿjaz got quiet after that. (Hakim 2011: 75)

Eʿjaz had a famous "mystic line" (*maltaʿ-i ʿārifānah*) that he wrote on the way to Lahore and where it grabbed the attention of the local literary scene for its wit and humor (Khushgu 1959: 36; Azru 2004: 139; Walih 2005: 283; Sarkhush 2010: 39):

> کشدهام ز جنون ساغری که هوش نماند
> دگر معامله با پیر می فروش نماند

> I have absorbed from the madness of a goblet that consciousness does not remain
> and the other matter is that the wine seller does not stay with the saint.

Eʿjaz was a student of the Agra-based poet ʿAbd al-ʿAziz ʿIzzat (c. 1650s) and kept company with poets like Nasir ʿAli, Bedil, and Moʿiz Musawi Fitrat (Arzu 139 Sarkhush 38). Khushgu tells us that he was from a "middling class of people" (*ausat al-nās*) that wrote in the old style of Persian as opposed to the *tāzah-goʾī* approach favored by his

friends. One of Eʿjaz's poems seems to comment on the importance of ghazal recitation's ability to cast an appropriate environment for lyrical understanding.

بساغر بهار جلوه‌ات طرح چمن ریزد
کند در دست ساقی قلقل مینا غزل خوانی

> Your radiance pours the foundation of the garden from the goblet of springtime
> Reciting ghazals makes the wine in the decanter bubble up in the hand of the barmaid

Afrin uses the phrase that they were stoking a poetry debate or the mushaʿirah was heating up (*mushāʿirah rā garm mī sokhtand*), to show the situated conception of literary competition, and Eʿjaz promote's this idea as well with his image of the decanter's wine boiling over from the heat of reciting ghazals.

For being a relatively minor poet Eʿjaz had some real gems that earned him a commendable amount of space in the 1700s' tazkirahs. Apparently he had schooled himself in the style of the early Persian writers in the *qasbah* town of Dihai (?) near Agra. In one gathering that seemed to be on the verge of boiling up, he came to his teacher's defense when ʿAbd al-Aziz ʿIzzat presented this line:

صدایی بُر نمی خیزد ز بسمل کرده نخجیرش
مگر زد آن شکارافکن به سنگ سرمه شمشیرش

> The sound of cutting would not rise up from his prey thrashing in death throws,
> But that hunter struck his sword with collyrium stone.

Another mushaʿirah attendee asked, "'To draw the dagger across the stone is idiomatic, but is there a place where [the phrase] 'striking on a stone' has come into your honored gaze?" ʿAziz said he had but couldn't remember, noting there must be an example form the ancestors (*salaf*), Eʿjaz piped up with this line from Salman Savaji (1309-1376):

چون زند بر سنگ تیغ آن شوخ خوش می آیدم
آب چون غلطد به روی سنگ گردد خوشگوار

> I was gladdened when that flirt's dagger struck the stone,
> When the water was tossed on the stone's face it turned delightful.
> (Sarkhush 2010: 139)

While there is some sense that the shrine could become a literary space for erotic and playful poetry, it is striking that the Wazir Khan mosque and others would become the grounds to hold an interchange on the appropriate roles and actions of the ghazal

542

universe's leading characters. Eʿjaz's closeness with Nasir ʿAli gave him a way to question Nasir Ali's novel reversal of the Lover and Beloved's letter-writing roles—as we know Eʿjaz preferred the style of the early Persian writers and we can see this in his imagery and knowledge of Salman Savaji's verses.

Appendix C: Mulla Shaida's Critique of Qudsi

Oh clever assayer of literature, carefully judge
The worth of every word on the scale of wisdom without limit.

ای شخن سنج هندمند به اندیشه بسج
نقد هر حرفی به میزان خرد بی کم و کاست

The lament is a wind in the chest that blows unintentionally,
Since to fly form the chest there has to be a type of wind.

ناله در سینه هوایی‌ست که بی قصد رود
چونکه از سینه هواگیر شد از جنس هواست

The world would not feel constricted by [wind] but from affliction itself,
Although the world's creation is equally bothered by it.

عالم از وی نشود تنگ ولیکن ز ملال
خلق عالم گر از او تنگ نشینند به جاست

I say that the feeling of constraint in the world is from *your* moaning,
Since its from your constrained sight that this was not brought to your attention.

خود گرفتم که جهان تنگ شد از نالهٔ تو
که ز تنگی نظر از چشم نیارد برخاست

These two lines are not arranged in any kind of mutual coherence;
After some consideration, the figure of speech is separate from both.

نیست ترتیب دو مصراع به هم ربط پذیر
که سیاق سخن از هر دو به اندیشه جداست

The constricted feeling in the world does not have the same *quality* as wailing;
The world is tight on the heart from having become anxious.

تنگی عالم از ناله نه کیفیت اوست
که جهان تنگ ز اندوه شده بر دل‌هاست

Thus wild rue cannot be raised to the tip of flame as a general rule;
Reason being is that *quantitatively* it is on the whole spatially constrained

برنخیزد چون سپند از سر آتش به قیاس
سبب او به کمیت همه از تنگی جاست

How is there a feeling of constraint in space; where is the feeling of constraint from sadness?
Rather there is a mutually generated division like the body and soul.

تنگی جا ز کجا تنگی اندوه کجا
بیشتر از تن و جان تفرقه‌ای هم پیداست

Appendix D: Munir Lahori's Critique of Shaida's Critique of Qudsi

Hey literary critic, if there shall be any how or why to your critique,
It is that rancor is not a quality befitting literary gentlemen.

ای سخن سنج کم و کیف کم ار گیری به
زیباست نا سخن ارباب ز کین مقولات

And if in the this couplet some vomit had come up,
Literature still agrees with you, though it is governed by taste.

زانه ور سخن نیفتاده بیت اندرین
حکمت است مذاق به موافق سخنت گرچه

The peculiarity of a poem of one is the practice of knowledge of another;
Your version of literature is not within that definition and is an illustration of [your] vexation.

است دگر حکمت دگر پیشهٔ شیوهٔ شعر
سخنت نیست درین معنی و اندیشه گواست

In taking their quill's pulse, whoever was understood to have a literary disposition,
He is required to seek his treatment according to laws of literary practice.

قلم نبض سخن از مزاج دانسته هر که
شفاست محتاج سخندانی قانون کی به

You're not getting the delight of this verse, so why this last vestige of sullenness?
This is not customary for the companions of meaning-creation!

لطف این شعر نمی یابی قهر از بی چیست
پیراست معانی حریفان آیین نه این

For example, if a poet composes a delightful verse,
Even a velvety voice could raise me from sleep.

سخنی رنگین شاعر اگر گوید فی‌المثل
برخاست تواند خواب از نالهام مخمل از

Take away the silk of his speech not their apparent conceit;
For meaning is audible with the assistance of ambiguity.

گرفت نیارند نکته سخنش قماش بر
رساست ابهام مددکاری به معنی زانکه

Of course, mens' visions cannot be literary associated with the fuzz of velvet;
In the end, see from where and until how far a distinction goes. (Arzu 1974: 17-18; Baharistan 2009: 445)

مخمل خواب همسر نبود مردم خواب
کجاست زکجا تا به که تفاوت آخر بنگر

Appendix E: Walih and Hakim's Exercise

One day, while practicing a ghazal, Walih recited this couplet to me:

وفا و دوباره عمر کیمیا و حیات آب
این همه می رسد به هم یار به هم نمی رسد

> The alchemic water of life allows for one to have fulfilling lifetime all over again
>
> In spite of all that I would have had, the Beloved and I would never have come together.

...and said, "no one has the opportunity (*majāl*) to compose poetry these days."
Then at that very same moment he said to me, "you should also compose something during this practice."

I said, "Sahib, as you yourself said, no one has the opportunity (*majāl*), so what could I possibly compose?"

He smiled and said, "Just you consider what I said."

Your humble narrator really struggled to forge something in this meter. Here are a few lines from my ghazal:

یاد زمانه‌ای که من گل به خزان بچیدمی
موسم گل ببین کنون خار به هم نمی رسد

پنجهٔ عشق چاک زد بس که لباس هستی‌ام
دست به جیبم ار زنی تار به هم نمی رسد

صبر و قرار جان و دل مصرع والهام ربود
این همه می رسد به هم یار به هم نمی رسد

> I remember the time I would arrange flowers for you in Autumn,
> See the flower season. At this moment we would not have gotten the thorn.
>
> In so much as the claw of love rent the clothes of my existence;
> If the hand in my pocket would not have gotten hold of that thread to play with.
>
> Of Patience and fortitude, of life and mind, Walih's line has robbed me;

In spite of all that I would have had, the Beloved and I would never have come together.

Upon hearing this ghazal, Walih became enthusiastic and showed his praise for my eloquence (Hakim 2011).

Appendix F: Farrukh Siyar's Chronograms

Bedil and Bekhabar exchanged verse in 1719 over the assassination of Mughal emperor ʿAbd al-Muzaffar Farrukh Siyar. The Sayyid Brothers who had gained political clout and influence through several quick-fire imperial successions. They were the Shiʿi noblemen Sayyid Hassan ʿAli Khan Barha (1668-1720) and Sayyid ʿAbd al-allah Khan Barha (1666-1722) of the *qasbah* Jansath near present day Muzaffarnagar who had Farrukh Siyar deposed and blinded before ultimately orchestrating his assassination. It seems discussion this intrigue bled into gatherings "where dispute[s] would arise in the midst of these bifurcated sides (Bilgrami 1913: 129)." Citing an example of this, Ghulam ʿAli Azad Bilgrami quotes the following chronograms that Bedil and Bekhabar exchanged over the events. Bedil wrote:

<div dir="rtl">

دیدی که چه با شاه گرامی کردند

صد جور و جفا ز راهٔ خامی کردند

تاریخ چواز خرد بجستم فرمود

سادات بوی نمک حرامی کردند

</div>

> You saw what they did with the noble king
> They performed one hundred types of vain oppression and evil
> I sought the date from Wisdom and she said
> They were treasonous to even the scent of salt[197]

To which Bekhabar then responded:

<div dir="rtl">

با شاهٔ سقیم آنچه شاید کردند

از دست حکیم هر چه آید کردند

بقراط خرد نسخهٔ تاریخ نوشت

سادات دوایش آنچه باید کردند

</div>

---

[197] In other words, they violated the shah's every hospitality.

It is proper what they did to that sick/erroneous Shah
They did what ever was ordered by the doctor
Wisdom prescribes the date according to Hippocrates
The [Sayyid Brothers] gave him the necessary medicine

Azad Bilgrami quotes these verses in the context of the wider social divisions created by the Sayyid brothers' political wrangling and skullduggery. Quoting a Persian saying, "As a congregation they behave politely but in packs badly (*jamaʿī bah nekī mī kunand wa garohī bah badī*), Azad specifically alludes to political opinions dividing gatherings in two (*farīqain-i tarafah*). In the chronogram, Bedil plays on the idiom of being disloyal to one's salt or being treasonous to the one who feeds you (*namak harāmī kardan*). Bekhabar responds by alluding to Hippocratic medical practices that use quantities of salt to treat illnesses. While in Bedil's eyes the Sayyid brothers were perfidious as they spat on their rewards, Bekhabar found their deeds therapeutic for the Mughal polity. (Azad Bilgrami 2014: 197-8)

Appendix G: The Two Rangins

Oh Brother! I look to you entreatingly.
I have hope for some mercy from your court.

برادرا ز تو چشم عنایتی دارم
ز بارگاه تو امید رأفتی دارم

For *rangīn* is my pen name, please return it to me.
Because of our pen names' homonymy, my heart is wounded.

که یک تخلص رنگین من بمن بگذار
ز اشتراک تخلص دل من است فگار

Since you have the command of several thousand topics,
Your compositions are utterly replete with sparkle and luster.

ترا که قدرت چندین هزار مضمون است
ز آب و تاب کلام تو جمله مشحون است

If you might have wanted this pen name very much when thousands of words would run to you, sir.

اگر تو خواسته باشی تخلص بسیار
که لفظها بجناب تو می دوند هزار

I have heard that in the days of old the masters have shown such concentrated regard to their *dīwāns*.

شنیدهام که در ایام سابق استادان
نمودهاند عنایت تمامی دیوان

Is [my] lord not wonderful for his universal sympathy?
when you withdrew your sparkling hand from my pen name.

عجیب نیست ز اشفاق عام آن مخدوم
که از تخلص من بر کشی تو دست کروم

All I need from you is mercy and kindness,
Completely cleanse my heart of this confusion.

همین بس است مرا از تو رحمت و الطاف
دل مرا کن از این دغدغه سراپا صاف

Appendix H: Shafiq's Description of Inadvertent Plagiarism

When that rake would be, unveiled, and start
shamelessly flirting,
Then all the words that slipped from his mouth
would be select and choice.

"If you heard my poetry recitation at this moment
The nightingale's heart would roast with burning
jealously.

My every line is like the rose-cheeked ones'
tress[es].
If the hyacinth saw one of my lines it would curl
up [in anguish.]"

For a moment, there is a longing in my heart
That it would be just me and this quick witted
friend.

I would even say something about my sad state to
him,
And from there, I too would hear his words and
blandishments.

If I recite a poem that's fair in his judgement,
Then he would readily give his praises to me.

If there is a flaw or a fault that shows in my verse,
He would tell me so that my verse would have
some polish.

Sahib, listen and carefully understand what I say:
If you have some doubt or suspicion, don't veil it.

مجھ پاس وہ رنگیلا جب بے حجاب ہو وے
جو حرف منھ سے نکلے سو انتخاب ہو وے

گر میری شعرخوانی اس وقت میں سنے تو
بلبل کا دل حسد سے جل کر کباب ہو وے

ہر سطر بے گی میری جیوں زلف گلعذاراں
سنبل بھی جس کے دیکھے پیچ اور تاب ہو وے

مدت سے میرے دل میں ہے گی یہی تمنا
میں ہوؤں اور میرا حاضر جواب ہو وے

خدمت میں اسکی میں بھی کچھہ حال زار بولوں
وہاں سے بھی مجھکو کچھ حکم اور خطاب ہو وے

گر شعر خوب اپنا اس کے پڑھوں مقابل
تحسین مجھ پہ اس کی جلد اور شتاب ہو وے

ور سقم ہو وے اس میں اور نقص ہو وے ظاہر
دے وے خبر سخن میں تا آب و تاب ہو وے

صاحب سخن یہ میرا تو سانج کر سمجھیو
تجھ کو گمان اور شک مت اب حجاب ہو وے

I did not deliberately introduce someone else's theme.
When do people of principle have any need of
another's [topic]?

دانستہ میں نے مضموں باندھا نہیں کسی کا
محتاج غیر کا کب اہل نصاب ہو وے

Yet, this terror comes and hinders me,
When a fresh poem is selected from my heart:

لیکن یہ خوف مجھ کو ہوتا ہے آکے حائل
دل سے جو شعر تازہ جب انتخاب ہو وے

Oh God, may I not inadvertently plagiarize someone!
Then the nitpickers would count my verse as picked-over dinner.

ہو جاوے نا توارد کس سے مجھے الہی
تا نزد خوردہ چیناں خوردہ حساب ہو وے

Oh God, it is impossible to cure me of that fear. CHECK
May your grace come down upon my pen.

لا چار ہوں الہی اس کے علاج سیں میں
تیرا ہی فضل خامہ مجھ پر شتاب ہو وے

Where is there a poet that doesn't have *tavārud?*
Where is there an ocean without a single bubble?

وہ کون سا ہے شاعر جس کو نہیں توارد
دریا وہ کون سا ہے جو بے حباب ہو وے

Why isn't it in your power CHECK
You could make a complete account in one helpless person
Why doesn't your grandeur have the possibility
to take a complete account of one helpless person?

کس واسطے کہ تیری قدرت کا نہیں ہے ممکن
یک شخص نا تواں سے سارا حساب ہو وے

Either bless me, God, or I'll give up poetry—
Only then would I be worth anything in those
nitpickers' regard?

یا فضل ہو وے تیرا یا چھوڑ دوں سخن کو
نزدیک   خوردہ چیناں تب آب و تاب ہو وے

At this verse, my heart finished its tale.
Oh God, may its request be quickly granted:

اس بیت پر کیا ہے دل نے تمام قصہ
یا رب دعا کو اس کی اثراب شتاب ہو وے

Now that you have plundered all the poets' homes,
Oh *tavārud*, may your residence be turned over too!

برباد تو دیا ہے سب شاعروں کے گھر کو
تیرا ارے توارد خانہ خراب ہو وے

Appendix I: Moti's Ghazal as Recorded by Mus'hafi

With the bottle face to face there and here I am.
Now it's just a goblet and the decanter, and here I am.

گلابی روبرو ہے اور ہم ہیں
بس اب جام و سبو ہے اور ہم ہیں

Oh *Nāsih*, although you stitched the tear in my collar,
A darning thread is still there and here I am.

سیا گر تو نے چاک جیب ناصح
تو پھر تار رفو ہے اور ہم ہیں

You might send for me, but there would be no
excitement in my heart.
Oh crowd of sorrow, you are there, and here I am.

بلائیں گو نہ ہو وے دل کو واشد
بجوم یاس تو ہے اور ہم ہیں

In the moonlit night until morning, oh *Sāqī*,
The thought of the moonfaced-one is there and here I
am.

شب مہتاب میں تا صبح ساقی
خیال ماہ رہ ہے اور ہم ہیں

What sort of wave has come over my soul, that oh Moti?
It's just the edge of the water and here I am.

یہ کیا جی میں لہر آئی کہ موتی
کنار آب جو ہے اور ہم ہیں

Appendix K: The Iranian Accent

There is a distinction between a Qumi and a Kashani
when they were piercing pearls.

امتیاز قمی و کاشانی
این بود وقت گوهر افشانی

The Qumi, he properly enunciates;
the Kashani extends his lips while speaking.

که قمی او کند به عرض دهن
کاشی آید به طول لب به سخن

In the Persian language, it has become a parable to the
point that he substitutes "oo" for *alif* and *nūn.*

آن که در فارسی شدست مثل
الف و نون کند به واو بدل

even though they present what they mean grammatically
their lips turn *fatah* into *zammah.*

گرچه در نحو عرض مطلب شان
فتحه را ضمه عامل لب شان

Thus these "learned men" narrate Persian such that
even *ān chunān* becomes *ūn chunūn.*

فارسی سر کنند چون علما
آن چنان اون چنون بود همه جا

Since poets ought to be assayers of rhyme,
they can get a hundred treasure hoards from a single jewel.

شعرا چون شوند قافیه سنج
می توان یافت از گهر صد گنج

Everywhere first *sharāb* and *kabāb*
this example's *zammah* is like the word *hubāb*

همه جا اول شراب و کباب
ضمه دارد بسان لفظ حباب

A river for the proper mode of speaking
Is Isfahan's river as it flows on your tongue

رود خانه ز شسته گفتاری
زند خایه است بر زبان جاری

Appendix L: Hatim on Coffee

How sad for to me the world appears insipid and dull,
For a coffee cup keeps me company so warm and full.

چه غم از ما خنک رو گر جهان است
به صحبت گرم با ما قهوه دان است

How that coffee is the glory and riches of the gathering!
Easily, with no pretense, it is the grandeur of the gathering.

چه قهوه شوکت و سامان بزم است
به خوبی بی تکلف شان بزم است

A glass of it is the light of mens' eyes;
It's the blackness of the mascara of a beautiful eye.

چو نور دیدهٔ مردم پیاله
سواد سرمهٔ چشم غزاله

It's been admitted in the hall of kings.
It's the grandeur in the hands of the lords.

قبول بار گاهٔ باد شاهان
شکوه دست صاحب دستگاهان

It is so popular in the courts of kings
That it is the same as a kiss from the sweetest lips.

ازان مقبول در گاه شهان است
که او هم بوسه باشیرین لبان است

How coffee is the mercy of life and the excitement of the heart!
It is the spring of the gatherings and the splendor of the party.

چه قهوه راحت جان فرحت دل
بهار بزم و رونق بخش محفل

It is the favorite of the high minded.
It settles the nature of those with a pleasant disposition.

پسند خاطر عالی دماغان
تفرج بخش طبع خوش مزاجان

Even though the color of its appearance is black,
It is mistaken for musk or ambergris.

اگرچه صورت رنگش سیاه است
ولی بامشک و عنبر اشتباه است

How coffee must be the envy of wine in winter's season!
A glass of wine is confounded by a cup of coffee.

چه قهوه رشک می در موسم دی
خجل از ساغرش پیمانهٔ می

If you throw back a cup at once in the morning,
It shall turn your unhappy mood glad.

کشی گر صبح دم ازوی ایاغی
به بخشد بی دماغی را دماغی

The wine drinkers together with the coffee drinkers,
Yell at each other in the midst of the bar.

ز دست قهوه نوشان می فروشان
میان می کده باهم خروشان

If time, for a moment, gives me a chance,
I shall turn all the bars into coffeehouses.

اگر فرصت دهد یک دم زمانه
کنم می خانه‌ها را قهوه خانه

555

English	Persian
I have a communication to present in front of the ruler of coffee: The heart needs coffee to be delightful and happy.	مرا با قهوه ران رو ارتباط است که دل را موجب عیش و نشاط است
Two cups in the morning and two cups at evening, It's good before food and after bathing.	دو فنجان صبح و دیگر دو سر شام خوشا پیش از طعام و بعد حمام
Hanging out day and night to keep warm company— The tradition of drinking coffee together happily.	به صحبت صبح و شام از گرم جوشی چه خوش رسمیست باهم قهوه نوشی
It shall be the first courtesy to every guest, and in gatherings there shall be a cup of coffee or two.	بود اول تواضع بهر مهمان ز قهوه در مجلاس یک دو فنجان
What sort of formality would there be for the coffee drinker, When the snack before coffee is but two almonds?	تکلف چیست بهر قهوه آشام که تحت القهوه بس باشد دو بادام
It wouldn't be proper to even let it steep like wine for even a bit; The sedateness of wine could pull it down bit by bit.	نه شاید هم چو می یک دم کشیدن به تمکین می توان کم کم کشیدن
If you pour out one cup of coffee into the the rose garden, Spring will come with all its materials at your disposal.	به گلشن گر کشی از قهوه یک جام بهار آید بخدمت با سر انجام
If one puts a rose in the coffee cup, It will blossom into the mark of a tulip.	برای قهوه سازد گل پیاله نماید صورت بن داغ لاله
How a mere kernel in domains of love is a sultan! For his chest has been ripped open and his heart roasted.	چه بن در کشور عشق است سلطان که دارد سینه و دل چاک و بریان
The fire of love has been kneaded into its disposition, When it was roasted in the flames of love.	ز آتش عشق در طینت سرشته که شد در آتش الفت برشته
The disposition that turns toward the coffee bean, Has a connection with the mole of the Beloved.	بسوی بن ازان طبع است مرغوب که دارد نسبتی با خال محبوب

556

What a description of coffee, for all the friends, that Hatim
Brought forth in a composition on the orders of the nawab.

The lord sahib, prudent and cultured—
His title is Muhsin al-Mulk and Zafar Jang.

What a gathering that his name became the fire hot.
The sky is the strainer and the sun is the coffee pot.

چه وصف قهوه حاتم بهر احباب
به نظم آورد حسب الامر نواب

امیر صاحب و تدبیر و فرهنگ
خطابش محسن الملک و ظفر جنگ

زهی بزمی که نامش گشت مشعل
فلک شد قهوه پز خورشید منقل

557

Appendix M: Bedil's Song

Bedil composed the asides after the ellipses.

آن کیست که تقریر کند حال گدا را   در حضرت شاهی
از نالهٔ بلبل چه خبر باد صبا را   جز ناله و آهی

هر چند نیم لایق درگاه سلاطین   نومید نیم هم
ز روی ترحم بنوازند گدا را   گاهی به نگاهی

بر خرمن گل مار سیه خفیه که دیده‌ست   یعنی که دو زلفش
حیف است که همخوابه بود ترک خطا را   هندوی سیاهی

اندام تو در بند قبا شرط نباشد   الا که بدوزند
از لالهٔ سیراب به قد تو قبا را   وز غنچهٔ کلاهی

Who is it that announces the condition of this beggar ... in the majesty of a lord?
What news of the zephyr is there in the cry of the nightingale ... besides complaints and sighs?

Although the court of the kings is half worthy ... also only half hopeless.
Bestow pity on this beggar with [your] face ... and maybe your gaze.

While plucking the rose, a hidden black snake was discovered ... that is, his two tresses.
It's a pity that the Turk sinned as a bedmate ... with a black Hindu.

The shirt's drawstring shall make no stipulation on your "shape" ... otherwise, they shall sew.
Because of the drenched tulip ... and from the budding "hat."

Appendix N: Noted Verses Sung by *Qawwāls*

غبار راه گشتم سرمه گشتم توتیا گشتم

به چندین رنگ گشتم تا به چشمش آشنا گشتم

به هر صورت که گردید نبردم راه در کویش

نوای بلبل و بوی گل و باد صبا گشتم

I became the dust on the path, then just a mineral, then collyrium;
I became so many colors so that I became recognizable to his sight.
But no matter how many forms I took, the path did not take me to his lane;
Thus I only became the call of the nightingale, the scent of the rose, the wind in spring.

رقیبا من نمی گویم گل و باغ و بهار از من

بهار از تو گل از تو هر دو عالم از تو یار از من

مرا ای باغبان از داغ دل برگ و نوا باشد

چمن از تو گل از تو بلبل از تو لاله زار از من

Oh friend, I would never say that the rose, the garden, or even spring are for me.
Spring is for you, the rose is for you, and each of the two worlds are for you, but the Beloved is for me.
Oh gardener, to me the petals and melodies might be for this pitted heart.
The garden is for you, the rose is for you, the nightingale is for you, but the tulip bed is for me.

سنتا تھا جسے کعبہ و بت خانہ میں آخر

امجد میں اسے حضرت انسان میں دیکھا

This is what I last heard in the idol house and Kaʿbah
Oh Amjad, I saw what was inside mankind

بے غرض اپنی ہمیں یار کرے مل جانے سے

اور کچھ کام نہیں کعبہ و بت خانے سے

میں ہوں مے خوار و خرابات نشیں بادہ پرست

جی بے محظوظ مرا گردش پیمانے سے

I had my own designs in going to meet the Beloved.
What other reason would I have in going to the Kaʿbah or the idol house?

I'm a wine drinker, a squatter, and an alcoholic.
My soul is quite content with passing around the bottle.

Appendix O: Waqif's Poems Written in Separation from his Boyfriend

جس سے کچھ اس شہر میں بہلے تھا دل سو بھی گیا

دیکھیے واقف کی کون اب آکے دلداری کرے

The one whose been deceived in this city lost even his heart.
Just look, who will come and have a heart-to-heart with Waqif?

مل رہے ہیں دل سے دل آنکھوں سے آنکھیں جی سے جی

گو بظاہر یار سے واقف جدا افتادہ ہوں

They are meeting heart to heart, eye to eye and soul to soul
Openly, oh Waqif, I have been rendered separate from the Beloved

یہی انصاف ہے اے چرخ دوں پرور ترے گھر میں

رقیبوں کا بسے گھر اور ہمارا خانماں اجڑے

So this is the justice in your house, oh corrupting world!
The house of rivals thrives, and my household is overturned.

جو کوئی سامنے سے میرے یار گزرے ہے

تو ہی خیال میں بے اختیار گزرے ہے

Oh beloved, anyone who would pass right in front of me,
It's you that would inadvertently appear in my imagination.

Appendix P: from Nizami's *Treasury of Secrets*

The veil is a secret that literature abides.
It is a shadow from the veil of prophethood.

پرده رازی که سخن پروریست
سایه‌ای از پرده پیغمبریست

The rank of the great ones has revolved back and forth:
[The rank of] the poets came second and [the rank of]
prophets came first.

پیش و پس قلب صف کبریا
پس شعرا آمد و پیش انبیا

These two share a vision and are companions.
As if on a single kernel, they are both layers.

این دو نظر محرم یک دوستند
این دو چه مغز آنهمه چون پوستند

what ever sustenance sits upon this table,
It will not allow for literature to be a mere piece of life.

هر رطبی کز سر این خوان بود
آن نه سخن پاره‌ای از جان بود

Instead life has been hewn by the tip of a rose.
Reflection has been chewed by the heart's teeth.

جان تراشیده به منقار گل
فکرت خائیده به دندان دل

Appendix Q: Ummid Runs into Mir at the Rasul Numa 'Urs

<div dir="rtl">

در و دیوار سے اب صحبت ہے

یار بن گھر میں عجب صحبت ہے

</div>

Now it's just hanging out with doors and walls.
At home without the Beloved makes for strange company.

<div dir="rtl">

تیری آنکھوں کو دیکھ ڈرتا ہوں

الحفیظ الحفیظ کرتا ہوں

</div>

Looking at your eyes I get scared, [I say].
Lord protect us, Lord protect us, I say.

Appendix R: Babri Rindi's Ghazal

There are a hundred miracles and magic in one place in that eye.
One hundred destructions and desolations are prepared in that eye.

صد معجزه و سحر بیکجاست در آن چشم
صد فتنه و آشوب مهیاست در آن چشم

If a look falls upon a corpse it will be brought back to life.
The peculiarity of the messiah's breath is in that eye.

گر چشم تو بر مرده فتد زنده شود باز
خاصیت انفاس مسیحا است در آن چشم

From every glance a hundred daggers pierced my liver.
Oh Lord, how my heart desires that eye.

صد دشنه خورد در جگر از بهر نگاهی
یا رب دل مارا چه تمنا است در آن چشم

Oh Rindi, to track faith, love, and life,
Pay attention, for there is a hundred-fold calamity in that eye.

رندی ز بی بردن ایمان و دل و جان
هشدار که صد گونه بلاهاست در آن چشم

Appendix S: Khushgu's Defense

For humble Khushgu, in the shrine of the literary greats,
There is a plea that you ought to lend me your ears.

I wrote an opening line and Arzu said, "Bravo!"
The opening was like a rising sun and it is this here:

"The zealot keeps his prayer-mat far from the drunkards.
Please excuse me if marks of wine fall on my face."

An eminent poet of his time seeks the fresh style.
A Rudaki of this age says it often and says it well.

Akhtar, that auspicious rhetorician, is a first-rate ustad in
the arts,
the one whose name has been lighting up Rome and Syria
like a rising star.

However, Akhtar's eye was far from such a opening line.
He objected to the extent that he agreed with me.

"In Persian it's never correct for 'a mark to fall.'
For worthies of this art it is essential to know the language
first."

I said to him, "My ear, however, is accustomed to 'marks
falling,'
since it wouldn't come about, the rightful authority is
with you."

That poet again said, "This is a downright mistake."
In this manner I was misinformed of his correction:

"The zealot keeps his prayer mat far from the drunkards.
However only wine that is smeared can be excused."

بنده خوشگو را بدرگاهٔ بزرگان سخن
التماسی هست باید داشتن گوشی بمن

مطلعی گفتم که استاد آرزو گفت آفرین
مطلعی چون مطلع خورشید و آن این است این

زاهد از مستان مصلایی نمازی دور دار
گر برو داغ شراب افتد مرا معذور دار

شاعر والایی وقت خویش طرز تازه جو
رودکی این زمان بسیار گوی و خوب گو

اختر سعد سخن استاد فن عالی مقام
آن که نام او چو اختر کرده روشن روم و شام

برچنین مطلع که چشم اختر از وی دور باد
اعتراضی کرد از بس داشت با من اتحاد

نیست داغ افتادن اندر فارسی هرگز درست
اهل این فن را زبان دانی ضروری شد نخست

گفتمش هر چند داغ افتادنم گوش آشنا است
لیک تا پیدا نه می گرد و سند حق با شما است

باز فرمود آن سخنور کاین بود محض غلط
من غلط فهمیده اصلاحش نمودم این نمط

زاهد از مستان مصلایی نمازی دور دار
ورنه گر آلودهٔ صهبا شود معذور دار

565

Every day I read the color and scent of art's garden, that is, the Spring	خواند روزی رنگ و بوی باغ فن یعنی بهار
of a hemistich from the poems of all the great ustads in Iran's lands.	بیتی از اشعار استاد تمام ایران دیار
Hazrat Saʾib, who is the favorite of the sun and moon,	حضرت صایب که قربانند خورشید و مهش
the dust of his shrine is the kohl of Isfahan's eye.	سرمهٔ چشم سفاهان است خاک درگه
In so much as every language-learner is baptized in his compositions,	آن که باشد هر زبان دان را کلامش معمد
Like a dictum of divine law that came in the doctrine of the proven religion:	هم چو قول شرع کآمد در اصول دین سند
"Marks of wine have fallen down and blossomed all over my shirt.	داغ می گل گل به طرف دامن افتاده‌است
Just like a wine bottle, wine-drinking has fallen on my neck."	همچو مینا میکشی بر گردنم افتاده‌است
Thus, the poem is proof on the matter of "a mark falling."	چون بشعر موجد این کار داغ افتادن است
The integrity of this Persian is light for visionaries.	صحت این فارسی بر اهل بینش روشن است
The former poem is correct according to this incomparable comparison.	شعر سابق هم صحیح است از نظیر بی نظیر
Whomever says it's an error may have inadvertently made a mistake.	هر که می گوید غلط باشد غلط گو ناگزیر
I hope that these assayers of rhetoric would admonish him,	دارم امید از سخن سنجان که ارشادی کنند
and give a good grade to the better manuscript	نسخهٔ کان خوبتر باشد برو صادی کنند
The aim of the conversation is not to advertise my accomplishment.	مدعا زین گفتگو عرض کمال خویش نیست
Nor is it to posture at stooping like a dervish.	زان که وضع خود نمایی شیوهٔ درویش نیست
To me, a poem is self-evident to no one.	بنده را با شعر خودکار نی است با هیچ کس
Taking care not to make mistakes—this is literature and that's it.	از غلط باید حذر کردن سخن این است و بس

Appendix T: Nudrat's Lampoon of Sauda

خون معنی تا رفیع باد پیما ریخته
آبروئے ریخته از جوش سودا ریخته

خود به خود در جنگ باشد آن رفیع پست قدر
برسر سودای خود از جہل صفرا ریخته
. . .
چوں کلاغ امشب که مغز سامعان را می خورد
ایں العیں در بزم طرح شور و غوغا ریخته
. . .
روز و شب از غصه می پیچد بخود مانند یار
زہر خود بر خویشتن از بس ز سودا ریخته

رنگ مہمل دستکاری ریخت تا از بیت پوچ
بود بر جا ریخته گوئی دلش را ریخته

Since that wine-drinking Rafiʿ spilled meaning's blood.
That madman Sauda in his lust spoiled Urdu literature's honor.

All by himself in the battle, that Rafi who's vile.
On Sauda's own head, in ignorance spewed bile.
…
Like a crow, tonight you eat the brains of people listening.
This total imbecile cast nothing but noise and tumult in the gathering.
…
Day and night, like a Beloved he wraps himself in self-regard.
It's enough to say of Sauda that he spits up his poison on himself.

Since that line of doggerel cast the handiwork of its absurd colors,
Wherever there is Urdu writing, the [blood of] their hearts was scattered.

Appendix U: Sauda's First Lampoon of Nudrat in a Quintain

شعر نا موزوں سے تو بہتر ہے کہنا ریختہ
کب کہا میں قتل کر مضموں میں کسی کا ریختہ
بے حیائی ہے یہ کہنا سن کے میرا ریختہ
خون معنی تا رفیع باد پیما ریختہ
آبروئے ریختہ از جوش سودا ریختہ

قاضی اور کوتوال سے لے جانتے ہیں تا بہ صدر
جنگ کا مبدا ترے گھر وہ رشک ماہ و بدر
پھر مجھے کہتا ہے اے پھروے تو یہ از راہ غدر
خود بہ خود در جنگ باشد آن رفیع پست قدر
برسر سودا بہ خود از جہل صفرا ریختہ

...

غرض میں جا میرزا بیدل کے تئیں با شد و مد
شعر ناموزوں و پوچ اس رات کو پڑھتا تھا جد
کہتے تھے سن سن کے تیرے حق میں سب یوں نیک و بد
چوں کلاغ امشب کہ مغز سامعاں را می خورد
ایں العیں در بزم طرح شور و غوغا ریختہ

...

لوگ کہتے ہیں تجھے دیوانہ ہے یہ نابکار
کچھ قبیلہ میں نہیں ہے اس کے کوئی گلعذار
ہاتھ میں جس کے یہ بھروا دیکھتا ہے زلف یار
روز و شب از غصہ می پیچد بخود مانند یار
زبر خود بر خویصتن از بس ز سودا ریختہ

آپ کو مت دیکھ دونا اوروں سے اے بھڑوئے پوچ
خریت اس میں ہے کر کشمیر کو جلدی سے کوچ
حق میں سودا کے ترے خامہ سے اے خط کے نوچ
رنگ مہمل دستکاری ریخت تا از بیت پوچ
بود ہر جا ریختہ گوئی دلش را ریختہ

568

It's better to compose in Urdu than an ill cast poem [in Persian].
When did I compose a *Rekhtah* poem that murdered someone else's theme?
Hearing my Urdu verse, it is impudent to say:
>   That wine-drinking Rafi⁣ᶜ [Sauda] spilled meaning's blood.
>   Out of madness, Sauda sullied Urdu's honor.

From the *qāzī* to the *kotwāl*, all the way up to the chief, I know this much:
Oh envy of the moons, the cause of this battle is with your camp.
And then you say to me, oh pimp, from the path of treachery,
>   "All by himself in the battle, that Rafi⁣ᶜ who's vile
>   On Sauda's own head, in ignorance, spewed bile."
...

With force and out of spite at the abode of Bedil
When he recited nonsense and ill cast verse tonight
Having heard all this, said, "Whether good or bad, everything is in your right."
>   Like a crow, tonight you are eating the brains of the audience.
>   This total imbecile cast nothing but noise and tumult in the gathering
...

People say this son of a bitch is mad about you.
But in his tribe there is no rosy cheeked Beloved.
Now this pimp can see in whose hands rest the tresses of the Beloved.
>   Day and night, he was wrapping himself in self-regard for the Beloved
>   It's enough to say of this mad man that he spits up his poison on himself

You pimp of doggerel, two times a dog, don't look to [Bedil]!
Everything is fine here so just march off to Kashmir at once.
It's in Sauda's right, because of your pen, oh scratch of letters,
>   Since that line of doggerel cast the handiwork of its absurd colors,
>   Wherever there is Urdu writing, the blood of their hearts was *Rekhtah*.

Appendix V: Sauda's Second Lampoon of Nudrat in a Quintain

ایک غزل کا عرس میں تم سے انصرام ہو
بحر میں جس کی ہر طرح شبۂ خاص و عام ہو
تقطیع اس کے جس کنے صبح سے تا بشام ہو
اس کی طرف سے آخرش تم کو یہی پیام ہو
گھوڑے کو دو نہ دو لگام منھ کو تنک لگام دو

کس میں کرو گے میری بجو فارسی کا تو یہ حال
اگرے رہا جو ریختہ اس میں کسی کی کیا بحال
بولی میں اپنی تم دعا دو جو کسو کو میرے لال
جوتی کو لے کے ہاتھ میں تم سے کرے وہ سوال
گھوڑے کو دو نہ دو لگام منھ کو تنک لگام دو

شال نہیں یہ مولوی کیجیے جس کو شست و شو
یاں تو پھٹا ہے آسماں ہو وے یہ کس طرح رفو
کیا کروں اس کو بھلا کیا کریں خان آرزو
اب تو یہ بات ہو گئی خانہ بہ خانہ کو بہ کو
گھوڑے کو دو نہ دو لگام منھ کو تنک لگام دو

That one ghazal that you completed in the ʿurs,
The one whose meter was completely doubtful in every way
Which ever way you scan it from morn until night
In the end, because of it I have to give you this advice:
    Bridle the horse, don't bridle me, [instead] bridle yourself

The thing is, how could you make fun of my Persian?
Whoever was ahead in this battle, it's their *Rekhtah* that flourishes
Go on and give him your blessing in your own language, my dear,
Taking a shoe in hand he will ask you that same question:
    Bridle the horse, don't bridle me, [and why not] bridle yourself?

… This is not some [Kashmiri] shawl that you can just wash, oh Maulvi
Now that you've ripped the skies, what kind of darning can be done?
How can I make good on this? What would Khan-i Arzu do?
But now it's being said from house to house and alley to alley:
    Bridle the horse, don't bridle me, [instead] bridle yourself!

570

Appendix W: Sauda's Lampoon of Nudrat's Daughter in a Sestet

سنا جاتا ہے فن شعر میں بھی اتنی ہے قبال
سبق اس سے پڑھیں اس وقت ہوں گر میرزا بیدل
اگر وہ درس دےہوے ہم سے نادان کو تو کیا حاصل
سمجھنا مطلع ابرو کا اس کے سخت ہے مشکل
بدقت می تواں فہمید معنی‌ہائے ناز او
کہ شرح حکمت العینست مژگان دراز او

غرض میں کیا کہوں سودا کہ اس فضل و کمال اوپر
نہیں پڑھ سکتی شعر مولوی ہر گز موزوں کر
خدا جانے وہ ناموزوں پے یا انکی ہے یہ دختر
ادا کرتی ہے یا ان سے انہیں یا جانتی ہے خر
بدقت می تواں فہمید معنی‌ہائے ناز او
کہ شرح حکمت العینست مژگان دراز او

We keep hearing how accomplished she is in the art of poetry.
Had Bedil been here then he would have learned from her!
If she were to instruct me, then what could an ignoramus like me possibly acquire?
It ought to be known that the rigidity of the eyebrow's opening line is difficult.
Only with difficultly are you able to understand the meanings of her coquetry.
For her long eyelashes are al-Bukhari's explication of the metaphysics book *Hikmat al-ʿAin.*

In short, what can I say about all this learning and perfection.
There is no way she could have crafted a maulvi's verse and recited it.
Lord knows, is it he who is inappropriate or his daughter?
Either she's being sly with him or she simply thinks he's an ass.
Only with difficultly are you able to understand the meanings of her coquetry.
For her long eyelashes are al-Bukhari's explication of the metaphysics book *Hikmat al-ʿAin.*

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