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Black Curls in a Mirror: The Eighteenth-Century Persian Kṛṣṇa of Lāla Amānat Rāy's *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* and the Tongue of Bīdil

Stefano Pellò

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Abstract This paper is the first substantial study of the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt*, an unabridged Persian verse translation of the tenth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, completed in Delhi in 1732–33 by Amānat Rāy, a Vaiṣṇava pupil of the influential poet-philosopher Mīrzā ʻAbd al-Qādir Bīdil. The paper focuses especially on the textualization of Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇaite devotion within the framework of Persian literary conventions and the dominant Ṣūfī-Vedāntic conceptual atmosphere, with a special attention for the intertextual ties with the works of Bīdil. A few philological remarks on the contours of a hitherto largely ignored Kṛṣṇaite subjectivity in Persian are also included.

Keywords Amānat Rāy · Bīdil · Kṛṣṇa · *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* · Persian translation

In the first chapter of his *Haft tamāshā*, "The Seven Views," a doxographic work completed in the early 1800s and devoted primarily to an articulate description of the beliefs and religious habits of various communities of Hindus and Indian Muslims, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan Qatīl, while dealing with the "creed" (*maẕhab*) of the Smārtas (*samartgān*) and the "cult" of the eighth *avatāra* (*avatār-i hashtum*) Kṛṣṇa (*kishn*), writes:

> The capital city of Kanhaiyā is the town of Mathurā….In a large *qaṣba* called Gokul, at a distance of two *karoh*s from Mathurā, lies a place called Bindāban….These two cities, that is, Mathurā and Bindāban, are set on the bank of a river named Jumnā and are the house of pleasure (*ʻishratkada*) of Kanhaiyā. Hindūs (*hinduwān*) call *Ban* the territory between Bindāban and

Stefano Pellò
pello@unive.it

Ca'Foscari University of Venice, Venice, Italy

> Mathurā. In Hindī, *ban* means "open field" (*maydān wa ṣaḥrā*), but this is only its literal meaning: in fact, not every wilderness can be called *ban*, the term being technically used by Hindūs to refer exclusively to this place…. According to their creed (*maẕhab*), this forest (*jangal*) called *Ban* provides soothing for the spirit (*tāzagī-yi rūḥ*) and deep joy for the heart (*shiguftagī-yi dil*). The land where this forest lies is called *Birj*…, and the whole region is considered to be the ground of love and the terrain of affection (*khāk-i ʻishq wa zamīn-i maḥabbat*) (1875: 16).

Qatīl, who is writing in Lucknow for an Iranian audience (1875: 4), is not only expressing a cultic truth by recalling several immediately recognizable lexical and metaphorical features of the codified mainstream tradition of Persian lyrical poetry (*ʻishratkada*, *tāzagī-yi rūḥ*, *shiguftagī-yi dil*, *khāk-i ʻishq*, *zamīn-i maḥabbat*, a few lines later *ʻayshgāh*, *maʻshūqa*, *ʻāshiq*, and so on). A Bhandārī Khatrī from a prominent *munshī* family, who had converted to Twelver Shīʻism at a young age,[1] Qatīl is actually reconnecting to a whole set of late seventeenth- and especially eighteenth-century Indo-Persian texts, from *taẕkira*s to *maṡnawī*s, where the bliss of the Braj *maṇḍal* and the amorous deeds of Kṛṣṇa had already carved out a specific place for themselves, enlarging the inclusive repertoire *from within*.[2]

As variously claimed in recent times, one of the "new horizons"—to use Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam's (2012) expression—conquered by the eighteenth-century Khatrī and Kāyastha writers of Persian is the organization of a noncontrasting self-representational and self-promotional space, both as Vaiṣṇava and Persianate intellectuals, within the textual reality of Indo-Persian literary culture. As Qatīl's receptive observations aptly suggest, a non secondary aspect of this process of self-projection—aesthetical as much as historical—is easily the rich output of Persian poetic translations, rewritings, and original compositions referring to the Indic religious environment authored by Hindu *munshī*s during the eighteenth century, already noted by Aziz Ahmad in the 1960s (Ahmad 1964: 235) and substantially overlooked up to now. The principal question I am posing here is whether and how we can begin to speak of Vaiṣṇava textuality within this specific framework textured by change and newness, as well as by the confidence of *munshī*s in making their own use of received literary models. In other words, if categorization is meaningful, then I would like to add a fifth category to the four groups of "translations" from Sanskrit as described by Carl Ernst (2003: 174): the "scientific" works of Sultanate era, the "historical" endeavors of Akbar's court, the philosophical-comparative explorations from the time of Dārā Shikōh, and the early British colonial "informative" texts. We can provisionally identify this tentative "fifth category," indeed, in the more or less devotional (especially but not only

[1] For a survey on the shifting representation of the historical-poetical persona of Mīrzā Qatīl and his Hindu background in Indo-Persian *taẕkira* literature, with special attention to the semiotics of his conversion, see Pellò 2012: 161–68 and 2016.

[2] In a wider multilingual perspective, the multiple intersections at the level of poetic practices involved in similar processes (from, to, or within the Persianate space) have been explored in studies such as Busch (2011: 130–65) and Orsini (2014). Some relevant textual specimens more directly related to the Indo-Persian sphere, primarily from Indo-Persian *taẕkira*s, have been discussed by Pellò 2014: 30–42.

Kṛṣṇaite) works by *munshī*s identifying themselves (and identified in *taẕkira* literature) as *hindū* and creatively applying to their textual identities the traditional Persian set of lexical tropes—such as *butparast*, *ṣanamparast*, and *aṣnāmī*—used to identify the "idolater."[3] As pointed out elsewhere (Pellò 2014), but I shall elaborate further here, studying this textual world means not only exploring how (a certain amount of) Vaiṣṇava devotionality is projected onto the preexistent Persian poetic palimpsests, but also, and perhaps more importantly, measuring to what extent the poetical codes and protocols themselves are capable of moulding and widening their set of extra- and intra-textual references to accommodate such devotionality. In general, this paper also hopes to offer some useful insights into how to better articulate a series of questions revolving around the sociotextual (to use Sheldon Pollock's formulation) contours and refractions of the poetic self in a late Persianate environment. In such a context, the monumental Persian rewriting of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (and especially of its tenth *skandha*) by one of the disciples of Mīrzā 'Abd al-Qādir Bīdil (1644–1720)—Amānat Rāy—seems particularly representative and promising, considering both the relevance of the poetic *silsila* Amānat appears to belong to and the fortune of his work in nineteenth-century printed editions. Indeed "Reading the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in Bīdil's Poetic Circle" would have been an appropriate alternative title for this essay; as we shall see, while textualizing Kṛṣṇa in his Persian *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Amānat is also responding to the stylistic and philosophical premises of his master's works, from his *dīwān* to his *maṡnawī*s to his autobiography.

The Textual Biography of Amānat Rāy

The biographical data on Amānat Rāy appearing in *taẕkira* literature are relatively scanty. There is no entry devoted to him in the main source for Bīdil's *maktab*, the *Safīna-yi Khwushgū* by Bindrāban Dās Khwushgū, nor in the *taẕkira gul-i ra'nā* by Lachhmī Narāyan Shafīq, whose second volume is declaredly devoted to Hindu poets of Persian.[4] While the reasons for this exclusion are not clear to me, short biographical sketches and a few verses of his do appear in other sources. The most important among these, and apparently the oldest one as well, is the *Taẕkira-yi Ḥusaynī*, completed in Delhi by Mīr Ḥusayndūst Ḥusaynī in 1750 while Amānat was still alive:

> The poet who embellishes the expressions, Amānat Ray, belongs to the Khatrīs of Lalpūr and is one of those people who were favored by the company of Mīrzā 'Abdul Qādir Bīdil. For a certain period he was the chief secretary (*mīr munshī*) of Nawāb Amjad Khān, the foster brother of emperor

[3] For details regarding the use of the term *hindū* in premodern and early modern Persian literature, see Pellò 2012, 2014, and 2015. On the relevant complementarity of ethnography and trope in Mughal textuality, see also Sharma 2012.

[4] Some scanty biographical and bibliographical information on Amānat can be found in 'Abd Allāh (1992: 203–4), Baqir (2011), Anūsha (2001, 1: 260). As we shall see later in this paper, Amānat himself provides the reader with some significant autobiographical information in his own poetic works.

> Muḥammad Shāh. He once related this incident: "One night, I was walking near some ruins, thinking about writing a *dīwān* of verses, when suddenly, in the darkness, I saw a madman in high spirits dancing hand in hand, though respectfully, with my master. In the height of ecstasy, my master looked at me and said: 'Go, and a whole sea of pearls and rubies will for certain burst from the spring of the particles of dust!' And so I went, and I succeeded in completing my *dīwān* in a very short time." He translated the whole *Srī Bhāgavat* [*Purāṇa*], the *Nāyikabhed*, and other similar works from Hindi to Persian poetry (1875: 48–49).

Together with the personal relationship with his master Bīdil, the other main trait of the poetic personality of Amānat—that is, his interest in the Persian rendering of Indic works—as already been clearly stated by Ḥusayndūst Ḥusaynī, who also pointed out his provincial Khatrī provenance and the courtly environment where he lived in Delhi. Just over fifty years later, in 1804, Bhagvān Dās Hindī, writing in Lucknow, adds some more information in his *Safīna-yi Hindī*:

> He was the *munshī* of Nawāb Amjad Khān. After the latter's death he was protected by Rahīm al-Nisā' *begam*, the Nawāb's sister also known as Kōka Ṣāḥib, who used to pass him a monthly salary. In poetry he is a disciple of Mīrzā Bīdil. He has left a huge *dīwān* and versified long Hindi books (*kutub-i mabsūṭ-i hindī*) such as the *Bhāgavat* and the *Rāmāyan*… (1958: 21–22).

The figure of Amānat is characterized, again, by his Persian poetic renderings of Sanskrit classics such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, to be added to the *Nāyikabheda* which is mentioned, as we have seen, in the *Taẕkira-yi Ḥusaynī*. This trend will continue in much later texts. Debī Prashād "Shād" mentions Amānat Rāy in his *Taẕkira-yi āṡār al-shu'arā-yi hunūd*, a little-known collection of biographical notes and short verse anthologies of 656 Hindu poets writing in Urdu (and Persian as well) up to the second half of the nineteenth century:

> Amānat: the *takhalluṣ* of Rāy Amānat Rāy, who used to live in Dihlī's Darībā neighborhood. No details about his life are known. He must be the same Amānat Rāy who composed the versified translations of the *Rāmāyan* and the *Bhāgavat* (Debī Prashād 1885: 7).

Debī Prasād, who quotes only one Urdu line attributed to Amānat, basically identifies the author with the Persian versified translations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; other biographical sources deal with Amānat as well, without however adding too much.[5] As a matter of fact, by the time Debī Prashād is writing, Amānat's two main poetic enterprises, the *Rāmāyan* mentioned by Bhagvān Dās and Debi Prashād and the *Bhāgavat* mentioned by all his biographers, had already been circulating in printed editions,[6] published by Naval Kishor in Kānpur and

[5] For instance, the *Muntakhab al-laṭā'if* by Raḥm 'Alī Khān Īmān (2007: 136), the *Bāgh-i ma'ānī* by Naqsh 'Alī (1992: 28), and the *Ṣubḥ-i gulshan* by Muḥammad 'Alī Ḥasan Khān Salīm (1878: 37). These three texts indicate Amānat Rām instead of Amānat Rāy.

[6] The copy of the *Srī Bhāgavat* 1–9 at the British Library, for instance, bears the stamp of the North-West Frontier Province.

Lucknow from the late 1860s onwards.[7] Remarkably enough, as far as the subsequent identification of his figure with the main subjects of his literary production is concerned, Amānat is described, on the cover page of the printed edition of the eleventh *iskand* (*skandha*) of the *Srī Bhāgavat* (1868), as "Expert of the Vedas, learned in the *śāstra*s and *bhakta*" (*dānā-yi bēd wa shāstragyānī wa bhagat*). Further stressing the "specialized" character of his poetic production and confirming Ḥusayndūst Ḥusaynī's and Bhagvān Dās's statements about Amānat composing other Persian remakes of "Hindi" works beyond the *Bhāgavat*, the *Rāmāyan*, and the *Maṡnawī-yi nāyak*, a *Bhagatmāl* (that is, *Bhaktamāl*, a collection of hagiographies of Indian saints, in *maṡnawī* form) also exists, of which two manuscripts (one incomplete) are preserved in Pakistani libraries (Munzawī 1985: 2140). As the nineteenth-century editor of Amānat's Persian *Rāmāyan* clearly states in his introduction to the book, his *Bhāgavat*, contrarily to the *Rāmāyan* "which since its composition has been difficult to find until now" (*ki az zamān-i taṣnīf tā īndam nihāyat nāyāb būda-ast*), is by far the most "famous and renowned" (*mashhūr wa ma'rūf*) of his literary works (Amānat 1872: Cover). Along with the *Rāmāyan*, with roughly forty thousand lines, this text is also the most consistent of Amānat's poetic efforts, confirming Sayyid 'Abd Allāh's judgment of our author as a "very prolific writer" (1992: 203).

The core of Amānat's *Bhāgavat* is not surprisingly the tenth *skandha*, which was the first part of the *Puraṇa* reworked by the Khatrī student of Mīrzā Bīdil and, according to all available evidence, was initially conceived as an independent work. As a matter of fact, the book bears the title *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* ("The Epiphany of the Essence"), which is also the chronogram of the date of its completion (AH 1145, that is, 1732–33), a key to understanding the Persian poetic textualization of the notion of the *avatāra* and a direct quotation from a perceived model of Ṣūfī poetics such as Ḥāfiẓ's *dīwān* (Amānat manuscript, folio 17b).[8] The rendering of the other *skandha*s was achieved by Amānat during the successive decades of the eighteenth century (the final date of completion of the rest of the *Bhāgavat* is indicated as the year 1807 of the Vikram era, corresponding to 1751; Amānat Nd: 695). Interestingly enough, Hermann Ethé describes the manuscript copy of the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* in the India Office collection in London as "A very large mathnawi on the adventures of Kṛishṇa, interspersed with many ghazals and rubâ'îs, and founded on Sanskrit sources, by a poet with the takhalluṣ Amânat" (1903: 918n1696). Probably on this imprecise description, the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* was erroneously described as an "original composition" in some secondary sources that never name the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in

[7] Compare Amānat 1868, 1870, 1872.

[8] *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* is found in one of Ḥāfiẓ's most famous *ghazal*s: *ba'd az īn rūy-i man u āyina-yi vaṣf-i jamāl / ki dar ānjā khabar az jilwa-yi ẕāt-am dādand* (Heretofore I shall turn to the beauty-describing mirror / because there they made me aware of the epiphany of the essence) (Ḥāfiẓ 1983–84: 372). The notion of *tajallī-yi ẕāt* (*tajallī* and *jilwa* being virtually synonymous), "the epiphany of the essence," has an important place in the conceptual universe of classical Persian Ṣūfī poetry and is explained in the glossary by Sayyid Ja'far Sajjādī as the "unveiling of the sun of the truth of supreme Truth (*ḥaqīqat-i ḥaqq-i ta'ālā*)" (1991: 223).

relation to this book.[9] The text is actually an all-inclusive rendering of the entire tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, a favorite among translators[10] and also, as already noted (Pellò 2014), a specific *topos* within Bīdil's *maktab* in Delhi. A *maṣnawī* in the *hazaj-i musaddas-i maḥẕūf* meter,[11] a favorite in Persian romance writing since Fakhr al-Dīn As'ad Gurgānī's *Wīs u Rāmīn* (eleventh century) and Niẓāmī's *Khusraw u Shīrīn* (twelfth century), the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* is an extensive work interspersed with a great number of *ghazal*s and *rubā'ī*s, consisting of about seventeen thousand *bayt*s collectively. The work is subdivided, both in the lithographed Naval Kishor edition and in the India Office manuscript, into ninety chapters corresponding quite precisely, in terms of narrative contents, to the ninety *adhyāya*s of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. These are preceded, in the printed edition, by a brief autobiographical note (*mājarā-yi sarguẕasht-i muṣannif-i srī bhāgavat*) (Amānat 1870: 1–5), a description of the causes leading to the composition of the book (*sabab-i naẓm-i kitāb*) (5–9), a long introduction (*shurū'-i kitāb-i mustaṭāb-i srī Bhāgavat*) (10–26), and several invocations (*munājāt*) (26–27). The order of these introductory sections is slightly different in the India Office manuscript (copied in 1772), where the introduction (folios 1–11b) and the invocations (11b–12b) precede the autobiographical note (13a–15a) and the occasion for the manuscript's composition (15a–18a). The descriptive titles of the narrative sections corresponding to the *adhyāya*s are already present in the manuscript as well (in red ink), with some minor discrepancies in the printed text. As mentioned above, the correspondence with the traditional subdivision of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is generally respected, and, with some exceptions (chapters 1 to 4 in the India Office manucript and 1 to 3 in the Naval Kishor edition cover *adhyāya* 10.1 and 10.2), each chapter corresponds to one *adhyāya*. A preliminary comparison of the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* with the other *skandha*s of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* rendered in Persian by Amānat reveals that the special attention given by Amānat to the recreation of the most beloved book of the *Purāṇa* is already apparent from a simple quantitative analysis: with around seventeen thousand lines, the ratio between the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* and the Sanskrit tenth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is an average of about four *bayt*s for every *śloka*; whereas in the case of *Srī Bhāgavat* 1–9 (fourteen thousand lines), the average ratio is less than two *bayt*s per *śloka*. Within this generally intensified focus, the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* receives a particularly attentive treatment; in the India Office manuscript, for instance, the Persian version of *adhyāya* 10.30 alone takes up almost seventeen pages (folios 104a, verse 12 to 112b, verse 4), corresponding to about two hundred eighty *bayt*s, compared to the forty-four *śloka*s of the Sanskrit text (more than six *bayt*s per *śloka*). This is not only very much in line with the fortune of the *pañcādhyāyī* in the vernacular literary space, which must have been

[9] Compare Baqir 2011 and Mujtabai 1978: 75. Mujtabai mistakenly identifies this work as the Persian *Bhagavad Gītā* by another disciple of Bīdil, Lāla Ḥukm Chand Nudrat.

[10] The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (especially the tenth book) had a remarkable success in Persian, both in prose and in poetry: incomplete (and not always precise) lists can be found for instance in Mujtabai (1978: 76–78) and Sharma (1982: 30–31). In more recent scholarship, a reconsideration of the Mughal translation movement is Truschke (2016). Keshavmurthy's (2018) study of Masīḥ's seventeenth-century version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*—another favorite with Indo-Persian writers—makes a good parallel reading for this paper.

[11] ᴗ - - - | ᴗ - - - | ᴗ - - (ᴗ), corresponding to the traditional scanning *mafā'īlun mafā'īlun mafā'īl*.

among the immediate sources for Amānat's work, but also—and more interestingly for our purposes here—with the interest of the Braj *maṇḍal* as the locus for the erotic pleasures of Kṛṣṇa and for Kṛṣṇa himself as a typological *ma'shūq* in Indo-Persian poetic *maktab*s. As a matter of fact, the Persian chapters on the *rāsalīlā* offer a privileged observation point to initiate a discourse on the pragmatics of those comparative poetics evoked by several eighteenth-century critics. Just to name a couple of relevant cases: the pages of Lachhmī Narāyan Shafīq (not by chance a disciple of the eighteenth-century "comparativist" Āzād Bilgrāmī) on Kṛṣṇa as the eternal beloved, where the lyrical language of Persian *ghazal* works like a "dubbing"[12] of the Indic imagery that is the object of his descriptions (Pellò 2014: 40); on the side of reception, the instrumentality of this kind of textual asset in providing a wealth of homogeneous literary material—forming a continuum with the transregional Eurasian dimension of the world of Persianate literature—for later observers and popularizers such as Mīrzā Qatīl (who explicitly refers to Kṛṣṇa when insisting that "the people of India," *ahl-i hind*, tend to describe love in poetry as the love of a woman for a man[13]) or, for that matter, the British with their puritan approaches.[14]

Envisioning the *Pañcādhyāyī* in Persian

Let us consider, as a preliminary sampling, Amānat's remake of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.29 (Amānat manuscript, folios 100a–104a).[15] The title chosen by the author is "The raising of the head towards madness of a multitude of women in the dark night / in search of a meeting with that moon without faults" (*sar kashīdan ba junūn-i khayl-i zanān dar shab-i tār / dar ṭalabkārī-yi dīdār-i mah-i bīnuqṣān*). The expressions,

[12] Here I attempt to conceptualize—by recurring to the familiar cinematographic metaphor of the dubbing of a movie in a foreign language—the tendency to use Persianate correspondents to summon simultaneously Indic poetic images; in Lachhmī Narāyan Shafīq's *taẕkira*, for instance, a verse where the canonical couple of lovers Laylā and Majnūn are used to "visualize" the preceding discussion on Kṛṣṇa and the *gopī*s (see Pellò 2014).

[13] Qatīl (1875: 7) is comparing three different practices of describing love in poetry: whereas the Indians would favor a woman-to-man perspective, he says, the Arabs would do exactly the contrary while the Persians (*'ajam*) would talk about it as a homoerotic experience.

[14] In the preface to the second volume of his *History of Hindostan*, Thomas Maurice introduces Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's English abridgement (from a Persian original) of the *daśama skandha*, included in the book, as follows: "I have not presumed to alter it farther than to blot out some parts which, however agreeable to a highly-seasoned Oriental palate, appeared to me to glow with colours and images not sufficiently chaste for an European eye. I should have erased more, but it was necessary that the reader should judge for himself concerning this motley character, which has been so impiously paralleled with that of the Christian Messiah….The reader must see Creeshna as he *is*, to judge of him properly; he must contemplate him with all the puerility and licentiousness, as well as with all the virtue and dignity, attached to his Avatar. I never intended to do the work of the adversary, by making Creeshna a *perfect model of an incarnate Deity*" (1798: viii–ix; emphasis in original). The figure of Kṛṣṇa is here even used with an anti-French purpose: with a sarcastic tone, Maurice writes that suggesting that "the history and miracles of Christ were borrowed from those of the Indian Creeshna" would have the "laudable purpose of plunging Christian Europe into all the horrors of atheistical France" (vi).

[15] Due to its relatively early date, its interesting transmission (see the last section of this paper), and the fact that it is integral, I prefer here to base the textual analysis of the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* solely on the India Office manuscript.

metaphors, and semantic paradigms (the defiant madness of the lover / Majnūn, the longing for the "meeting" with the beloved) selected by Amānat to introduce the celebration of the passionate love of the *gopī*s for Kṛṣṇa, all deeply immersed into the broad lexical and metaphorical hypertext of Ṣūfī poetics,[16] are, as a whole, reminiscent of the well-known episode of the Egyptian women losing their minds at the appearance of Joseph's beauty in ʻAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's famous *maṣnawī*, *Yūsuf u Zulaykhā* (fifteenth century).[17] Furthermore, if we look closer, at least three expressions are direct quotations from powerfully normative canonical works of pre-Mughal Persian poetry, all part of the linguistic education of a *munshī*:[18] (*i*) *khayl-i zanān* "multitude of women" comes from the didactical *Būstān* of Saʻdī (thirteenth century),[19] (*ii*) *shab-i tār* "dark night" clearly echoes the *shab-i tārīk* evoking the asperities of the path of the seeker, which introduces the fourth line of Ḥāfiẓ's first *ghazal* in the *Dīwān* (1983–84: 18), and (*iii*) *mah-i bīnuqṣān* "moon without faults" is taken directly from Mawlawī Rūmī's masterpiece of lyrical *ʻirfān*, the *Dīwān-i Shams* (thirteenth century), precisely from a stanzaic poem where the dominant theme is a dance with a beautiful Christian (*tarsā*) youth (Rūmī 1999: 1196–7). The significance of such intertextual ties is even more notable if we look at the immediate literary surroundings of the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt*. The reference to the "madness" (*junūn*) of the *gopī*s as an exemplary figure of love is, as a matter of fact, the key rhetorical feature of the passage devoted to the description of Mathurā by Amānat's master, Mīrzā Bīdil, in his own autobiography, where the prose evocation of the "tears of the *gopī*s" and Kṛṣṇa's *bāṁsurī* is followed by the "subtitles" of three *ghazal* lines revolving around "Majnūn's valley" (*wādī-yi majnūn*). Similarly, a *bayt* dealing with the "desert plains of Majnūn" (*ṣaḥrā-yi majnūn*) by Āzād Bilgrāmī is used by Lachhmī Narāyan Shafīq to comment upon his explicative description of the *gopī*s' love for Kṛṣṇa in the Indian "love poems" (references and translations in Pellò 2014). Amānat then dubs the first two *śloka*s and half of the twenty-ninth *adhyāya*, depicting the autumnal nights in Vrindāban, as follows:

shab-ī chūn zulf-i khūbān maṭlaʻ-i nūr
tajallībakhsh-i shamʻ-i rawshan-i ṭūr

sawād-ash sarkhaṭ-i lawḥ-i tamannā
bayāż-ash nuskha-yi ḥusn-i dilārā

[16] Generally speaking, the Akbarian anagogical systematization of Indian commentaries on major Persian Suficate works such as Rūmī's *Maṣnawī* or Ḥāfiẓ's *Dīwān*—I am thinking here, for instance, of the ready-made frames of the reference provided in Khatmī Lāhurī's *Maraj al-baḥrayn* (1628)—should be considered a probable source for Amānat's textual adaptations (as well as those of several other eighteenth-century Hindu Persian poets).

[17] The episode (Jāmī 1998: 78) is directly based on *Qurān* 12:30–32.

[18] An interesting catalogue of the Persian texts to be studied by a seventeenth-century Hindu secretary writing in Persian can be found in the letter written by Chandar Bhān Barahman to his son Tej Bhān (the letter is published in ʻAbd Allāh 1992: 268–70 and has been translated into English by Alam and Subrahmanyam 2004: 62–63).

[19] The expression appears in the first chapter of the didactic poem—one of the pillars of the linguistic education of any premodern and early modern Persianate intellectual from Bosnia to Ningxia—by Saʻdī (consult Saʻdī 1954: 315).

zamīn az jilwa-yi sarshār-i mahtāb
tamawwuj dāsht hamchūn āb-i sīmāb

ba saṭḥ-i āsmān anbūh-i akhtar
numāyān dar ṭabaq chūn musht-i gawhar

falak az lamʿa-yi māh-i jahāngīr
labālab būd hamchūn kāsa-yi shīr (Amānat manuscript, folio 100a)

A night resembling the curls of the beauties, an opening verse of light,
offering the epiphany of the bright candle of Mount Sinai.

Its blackness was the leading line of the blackboard of desire
its whiteness the manuscript of the heart-adorning beauty.

With the inebriated epiphany of moonlight, the earth
made a wave-like movement, resembling quicksilver.

On the surface of the sky, a myriad of stars
were showing themselves on a plate like a handful of pearls.

The sky, with the flashes of the world-conquering moon
was overflowing like a bowl full of milk.

The imagery chosen by Amānat to represent the bliss of the nocturnal environment, while in general substituting the reddish tones of the Sanskrit (*aruṇa*, *kuṅkuma*)[20] with the Persian ultra-classical black and white contrast (*shab* "night" / *nūr* "light," *zulf-i khūbān* "dark curls of the beauties" / *shamʿ-i rawshan* "bright candle," *sawād* "blackness" / *bayāż* "whiteness"), contains some notable specific references as well. The Biblical and Qur'ānic bush of fire of Mount Sinai (Ṭūr), representing the epiphany of God to Moses, is not only a centuries-old Persian poetic metaphor, in perfect harmony with the repeated mentions of the notion of manifestation so central to Amānat's work (*tajallībakhsh* and the very *jilwa*), but also a clear allusion to the work of the most representative masters of Mughal-Safavid times. As a matter of fact, the very expression *shamʿ-i ṭūr* appears to be relatively popular in the authoritative *ghazal*s by Ṣā'ib-i Tabrīzī and occurs as well in other great authors of the seventeenth century like ʿUrfī Shīrāzī, Waḥshī Bāfqī, and, most notably for our purposes here, Mīrzā Bīdil,[21] who uses the image of Mount Sinai as a place for the

[20] A detailed and articulated comparison of the aesthetic interactions between the Sanskrit *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the vernacular adaptations most likely available to Amānat, on the one hand, and the Persian text, on the one hand, is of course highly desirable. While deferring such an endeavor to a future study—the textual world of Amānat's readings, with the partial exclusion of the Persian ambit, still needs to be reconstructed—here I will be content with making general reference to the Sanskrit text as examples of a fruitful way to move forward, of course to be soon enlarged to the vernacular contexts.

[21] The image occurs several times in Ṣā'ib-i Tabrīzī's *Dīwān* (see, for example, 1985–95, 1: 146, 371; 2: 671, 908; 5: 2690). Compare also Waḥshī-yi Bāfqī (2001: 470) and especially Amānat's master Bīdil (1997, 2: 213). While, for the purposes of this paper, I strongly prefer a reading of Amānat's work as seen through the specific stylistic lens of the masters of the Mughal-Safavid period, and especially of his *ustād* Bīdil, it should of course not be forgotten that all the tropes mentioned in this paper have a long history in Persian poetry, often going back to the Samanid and Ghaznavid times and even to the Arabic poetry of the Abbasid courts. For a general introduction to the conventional imagery of Persian poetry, see Zipoli 2009.

appearance of knowledge even as the icastic title of one of his *maṣnawī*s, the *Ṭūr-i ma'rifat*. To proceed with a tentative comparison with the Indic aesthetics just mentioned, it is worth noting that the dense intertextual figure of the fire of Mount Sinai also represents a powerful change of dress for the equally paradigmatic image of divine epiphany represented by the similitude of the splendor of the face of Lakṣmī (Sanskrit *ram*) in the original textual environment. In addition, the equally iconic images related to milk dominating *śloka* 5 (*duhantyaḥ*; *dohaṁ*; *payaḥ*) in the Sanskrit text are anticipated and condensed (and never touched again) in Persian by the reference to the sky "overflowing like a bowl of milk" in line 5. With such a rich and articulate rhetorical play of transformations, relocations, quotations (*tażmīn*), and replies (*istiqbāl*), one should not forget however the creative role of all the familiar Persian images in effectively evoking, on the part of the reader used to the above-described comparative practices, the black yet luminous beauty of Kṛṣṇa himself, who actually appears in the following lines:

ba taklīf-i bahār-i 'aysh hamdast
srī krishn zi jām-i ḥusn-i khwud mast

ṣabāāsā ba sūy-i ban rawān shud
bahār imrūz har barg-i khazān shud

ba istiqbāl-i ū ṭaraf-i chamanhā
bar āmad būy-i gul az pīrahanhā

ba gulshan bā hujūm-i shawq har dam
shud az bahr-i sujūd-ash shākh-i gul kham

gul ānjā chūn 'arūs-i nawrasīda
libās-i surkh-rā dar bar kashīda (Amānat manuscript, folio 100b)

Hand in hand with all the fanfare of a spring of pleasure
Srī Kṛṣṇa, intoxicated by the cup of his own beauty,

like a breeze began moving towards Ban:
today every autumn leaf has become a spring.

In order to welcome him, towards the meadows,
from the shirts soared a perfume of rose.

In the rose garden, with the assault of passion every instant
the branch of the rose has bent to bow down to him.

There the rose, as a young bride
wore a red dress on her body.

The "divine power" (*yogamāyā*) that Kṛṣṇa resorts to while "turning his thoughts towards the enjoyment of love" (*rantuṁ manaś cakre*) in *śloka* 29.1 is overwritten, in Amānat's Persian remake, by the cardinal monistic-narcissistic notion, in Suficate literature, of the supreme identity of love, lover, and beloved (*ishq*, *'āshiq*, and *ma'shūq*), here inflected through the image of Kṛṣṇa "intoxicated by the cup (*jām*) of his own beauty (*ḥusn*)." Other than the several possible classical antecedents

related to the interconnected ideas of the reflective powers of the cup-mirror-heart and of God as both the creator and the lover of the reflection of his own beauty, it is worth pointing out that a direct source in conceptual poetics is to be found in the work of Amānat's master, for instance in Bīdil's cosmogonical *maṡnawī*, *Muḥīṭ-i aʻẓam*, where the metaphor of the "passing around" of the cosmic Wine Cup by the eternal Cupbearer has a constitutive role.[22] Beyond the *maṡnawī* environment, a strikingly precise parallel, in terms of imagery, comes from the *Dīwān* of Mīrzā Bīdil (1997, 2: 516):

mastī-yi ḥusn u junūn-i ʻishq az jām-i man-ast
dar gulistān rang-am u dar ʻandalībān nāla-am.

The intoxication of beauty and the madness of love come from my cup:
I am the color in the rose garden, I am the lament of the nightingales.

The entire textual landscape of the opening of Amānat's *pañcādhyāyī* is already present in Bīdil's line, marked by precise lexical parallels: the "intoxication" (*mastī*), the "cup" (*jām*), the "rose garden" (*gulistān*), the "color" (*rang*), the implied *junūn* "madness" that we have dealt with above, and even the "lament" (of the *gopī*s-nightingales) that appears a few lines later. In such a deeply intertextual milieu, the self-reflective epiphany of the beloved Kṛṣṇa is set in the prototypical Persian lyrical landscape of the garden into which the forest of Ban, colored by the gentle rays of the moon (*vanaṃ ca tat komalagobhī rañjitaṃ*), is transformed. The autumnal luxuriance of the North Indian natural scenery is maintained, in Persian, through the repeated exploitation of the rhetorical device of the *ḥusn-i taʻlīl*,[23] which again, at least in the case of the personified abstraction of the "assault of passion" (*hujūm-i shawq*), includes another precise Bidilian echo as well as a general stylistic tribute to other masters of *tāzagūyī*.[24] Thus, thanks to the appearance of Kṛṣṇa, "every autumn leaf" can "become a spring." Autumn, which in the Persian tradition is, in sharp contrast with Sanskritic aesthetics, the season of dryness and decay, can be magically turned into its own opposite, without distorting in the slightest the Indic original timing of the year and while keeping the *rāsalīlā* event in its proper South Asian season. In other words, exploiting the possibilities provided by rhetorical devices, it is the Persian fall (*khazān*) that is transformed into a spring—thus properly corresponding to the Indic autumn (*śārada*) of the textual setting—and not the reverse. The above-mentioned translatability of Kṛṣṇa with Joseph / Yūsuf is cleverly harnessed by the reference to the "perfume of rose" (*būy-i gul*) soaring from the "shirts" (*pīrahanhā*); Amānat is alluding here to the famed episode of the "perfume of Yūsuf's shirt" (*būy-i pīrāhan-i yūsuf*) substituting and

[22] On the *Muḥīṭ-i aʻẓam*, see Kovacs 2013.

[23] The *ḥusn-i taʻlīl*, literally "beauty of rationale" and generally translated as "fantastic etiology," is among the most widely employed figures of the so-called *ʻilm-i badīʻ*, or "science of rhetorical embellishment." Chalisova (2012) properly defines this figure, already described in the earliest Persian treatises on *ʻilm-i badīʻ* (eleventh century), as a "a conjunction of fantastic images within a syllogism" that "creates additional levels of opposition in the line, rationally 'proving' the possibility of the impossible and thus presenting lies disguised as truth."

[24] A number of textual parallels can be found for instance in Bīdil (1997, 1: 580; 2: 36, 362), but also in Ṣā'ib-i Tabrīzī (1985–95, 3: 1538; 4: 1967).

anticipating Ya‘qūb’s vision of his most beloved long-lost son (based on the “most beautiful story” of *Qurān* 12, and very popular, for instance, with Rūmī’s *Maṣnawī-yi ma‘nawī*).[25] With this reconstructed, recontextualized, and “told anew” (that is, in a *tāzagūyī* voice) background of heterotopic spring colors and perfumes, the voice of Kṛṣṇa’s *bāṁsurī* is finally heard:

dar ānjā az hawāy-i naghma-yi nāz
ba nay la‘l-i lab-i ū shud hamāwāz

zi bas az fayż-i la‘l-ash bahrawar shud
nay-i khushk az ḥalāwat nayshakar shud

chunān nay shu‘la zad dar kharman-i jān
ki dil-rā sūkhtan gardīd āsān

ma-rā z-īn chūb-i khushk-i lālasāmān
ba dast-i ḥayrat uftād-ast dāmān

ki bā labhā-yi ū hamāshyān shud
ḥalāwathā-yi ‘ālam-rā żamān shud

zi āwāz-ash chunān zad bīkhwud-i bīhūsh
ki shud har kas zi yād-i khwud farāmūsh

chi akhgar dar bar-i khwud dārad īn nay
ki labrīz-i sharar shud har rag-i way

chunān dar ‘ishq sur‘atdastgāh-ast
ki az dil tā ba ū yakwajh rāh-ast

zamīn khāk-ī ba sar az shawq-i nay shud
falak dar gardish az āwāz-i way shud

magar ārad zi sūy-i yār payghām
ki nay az dil kunad tārāj-i ārām (Amānat manuscript, folio 100b)

There, with the passionate air of a coquettish lament
the ruby of his lips became harmonious with the flute.

And the dry flute was so favored by the grace
of his ruby that, with that sweetness, it became a sugarcane.

The flute threw such a spark in the harvest of life
that it became easy, for the heart, to catch fire.

Because of this tulip-like dry wooden stick
the lap of my dress fell in the hands of bewilderment.

Whoever became intimate with his lips,
became the guarantee of the sweetness of the world.

[25] The scent of Yūsuf’s shirt is the subject of a celebrated twenty-five line paragraph in the third *daftar* of Mawlawī’s poem (Rūmī 1996: 431).

What firebrands does this flute bring with itself,
that every single fiber is brimful with sparks.

It is so quick moving in love
that from the heart to it is only a step.

The earth felt desperate because of the passion of that flute
the sky began rotating because of its sound.

Perhaps it also brings a message from the beloved,
because the flute plunders tranquility in the heart….

The *bāṁsurī* briefly mentioned by Mīrzā Bīdil while speaking of Mathurā in his *Chahār ʻunṣur* (see Pellò 2014: 35–36), and not even named in the corresponding passage of the Sanskrit text, is the object here of a poetic commentary composed of no fewer than nine whole couplets. If, in Bīdil's model work, Kṛṣṇa's flute is mirrored by the narrow alleys of the city and echoed by the wind passing through them "throwing sparks which make the dust dance (*shuʻlaāhang-i ghubārangīz*)" (Bīdil 1965–66: 148), in Amānat's *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* an entire set of canonical imagery for the flute is conjured up to give it a dynamic description. In this case, the representational weight of the traditional iconography of Kṛṣṇa with the flute encounters the possibility of being naturalized in Persian. This is achieved by drawing on a rich and apt metaphorical lexicon; the theme of the flute makes up for a substantial number of lines in most authors of *ghazal* and Suficate *maṡnawī*, beginning with the ubiquitous "song of the cane" that opens Rumī's *Maṡnawī-yi maʻnawī*, with all its figurative connections to the central *topos* of the lament (*nāla*) for separation (*hijrat*). By unfolding and amplifying a familiar literary image to textualize the iconic figure of Kṛṣṇa as a flute player, Amānat is adopting, as a matter of fact, the same strategy that allows eighteenth-century *taẕkira* writers to reuse a comfortable referential repertoire to include "new" literary actors (such as the *hindū* Khatrī and Kāyastha writers), so to say, in the collective *majlis* of Persian literature. In this case, he is exploiting the rich and centuries-old set of imagery and metaphors relating to the world of "unbelief" from the *zunnār*[26] to the fire-temple (Pellò 2012: 183–98). It is thus not only (or not so much) Kṛṣṇa who enters the Persian poetic codes, but, more aptly and subtly, the codes themselves that see their set of possible extra- and inter-textual referents enlarged to paradigmatically *include* Kṛṣṇa. The *nay*, while remaining a *nay* for all Persian poetic matters and purposes, at the same time calls upon the tune-setting opening of Rūmī's *ʻirfānī* masterwork, ʻAbd-al Raḥmān Jāmī's influential Naqshbandi reading of it,[27] as well as Kṛṣṇa's Sanskritic and "bhakta" *bāṁsurī*, in a polysemic dimension and with no real break. The *gopī*s complete this picture:

ba gūsh-i gūpiyān tā shud ṣadā-y-ash
zi khwud chūn nāla raftand az barāy-ash

[26] The *zunnār*—originally the belt of the Byzantines and a very common lexical item in poetry to characterize various kinds of "infidels"—is often used in the Indo-Persian literary world as the referent to "translate" the Brāhmaṇical thread.

[27] I refer here to the famous commentary on the first two verses of Rūmī's *Maṣnawī-yi maʻnawi* known as *Risāla-yi nā'iya* or *Naynāma* (see, for instance, Ridgeon 2012).

hama chūn ṣūrat-i dīwār mānda
ki dil az dast u dast az kār mānda

zi āwāz-ash yak-ī barjast az khwāb
rawān dar rāh-i ū chūn nāla bītāb

yak-ī bar khāk bīhūsh-i ū futāda
'inān-i dil chu ashk az dast dāda

yak-ī ā'īnasān maḥw-i khayāl-ash
yak-ī parwāna-yi sham'-i jamāl-ash

yak-ī nām-i kanayhā[28] *bar zabān dāsht*
yak-ī az bīkhwudī bā khwud nishān dāsht

yak-ī gum karda rāh-i khānimān-rā
yak-ī sar karda az shawq-ash faghān-rā (Amānat manuscript, folios 100b–101a).

When its voice reached the ears of the *gopī*s,
as a lament, they left themselves for him.

All of them were stunned like images on a wall:
the heart had stopped working, because of him.

Because of his voice, one rose from sleep
and, like a lament, restless, began walking towards him.

Another fell on the earth deprived of her senses,
having left the reins of her heart like a tear.

One, like a mirror, was nothing other than the imagination of him,
another was the butterfly of the candle of his beauty.

One had on her lips the name of Kanhayā
One, having lost herself, was inquiring after herself.

One had lost the way to her household
one, full of passion, had begun to shout….

The variety of the reactions of the women of Vraj described in *śloka*s 5–11 is read under the poetic species of the "madness of love" *junūn-i 'ishq*, along the same lines described above. Thus, Amānat's *gūpiyān* are at the same time a reflection of the cowherdesses of Vrindāban abandoning their homes and their husbands for Kṛṣṇa and a multiplication of the Qurānic and classical Arabic-Persian literary figure of Zulaykhā losing her mind and her honor for Yūsuf. The poet, one is tempted to say, is describing a whole bed of reeds (*nayistān*) of plangent reed flutes (*nay*) longing in separation for the beloved, the dominant *rasa* of *viraha* being appropriately filtered through the above-mentioned *topos* of *hijrat*. As in the above-mentioned cases, precise references to the textual mirrors of literary contemporaneity can be found here as well. First of all, the whole section is closely reminiscent, beginning with the very peculiarities of verse construction (the repetition of *yak-ī*… / "One…" at the

[28] The metathesis Kanayhā < Kanhayā is due here to reasons of meter.

beginning of each line), of the relatively long part (eighty-nine *bayt*s) of the third chapter of Bīdil's *maṣnawī*, *Muḥīṭ-i a'ẓam*, where a number of ecstatic reactions to the turning of the cosmic Wine Cup are described (Bīdil 1997, 3: 609–12). In more detail, the use of the widespread visual metaphor of the "images on the wall" (*ṣūrat-i dīwār*) can be closely linked to the complex and articulate discourse on the conceptual semiotics of the portrait made by Bīdil in the *Chahār 'unṣur*, where the very image of the wall-paintings is used to metaphorically reflect both on the creative activity of the *Deus pictor* and on the conditioned actuality of individual existence.[29] The intimately related theme of the mirror (*āyīna*)—a most representative key image of Bīdil's poetics (and, of course, of the whole Persian repertoire[30]) and its metaphorical substitutes (for example, the cup, *jām*, or the particles of dust, *ẕarra*)—is used to illustrate the reflective relationship between the *gopī*s / lovers and the appearance of Kṛṣṇa / beloved. In the above-mentioned lines, the *gopī*s are "nothing but the imagination" (*maḥw-i khayāl*) of Kṛṣṇa, "like a mirror" (*āyinasān*), as, in the following line of Bīdil (where the same expression *maḥw-i khayāl* is used), where every man is nothing but a bewildered, only illusorily distinct and individualized reflection:

> *āyīna naqshband-i gul-i imtiyāz nīst*
> *maḥw-i khayāl-i khāna-yi ḥayrānī-yi khwud-īm* (Bīdil 1997, 2: 573)
>
> The mirror is not the creator of images of the flower of distinction:
> we are nothing but the imagination of the house of our bewilderment.

Such transitional Ṣūfī-Vedāntic tones, and the related imagery of cups, mirrors, and reflections, are maintained in the rendering of the subsequent dialogue between Parīkṣit (*parīchit*) and Śuka (*sukhadev*), where the doubt of King Parīkṣit (how could the flow of the *guṇa*s of the *gopī*s cease, if they saw Kṛṣṇa as a beloved and not as the Brahman?) helps us to focus on the inner aspects of *ṣūratparastī*, the "adoration of the forms."[31] The following three lines from the ten-*bayt*-long question of Parīkṣit are a good summary:

> *zi la'l-i yār shīrīnkām gashtand*
> *tuhī az khwud ba rang-i jām gashtand…*
>
> *hama ẓāhirparastān-i khaṭṭ u khāl*
> *hama āyinasān mushtāq-i timṣāl*
>
> *chisān dīdand ḥusn-i bīnishān-rā*
> *bidānistand asrār-i nihān-rā* (Amānat manuscript, folio 101a)

[29] This conceptually dense episode in the autobiography of Bīdil (1965–66: 281–86)—already highlighted and summarized in Abdul Ghani (1960: 57, 67–68)—has been recently analyzed by Keshavmurthy (2016) and also discussed by Pellò (2017b).

[30] See Ḥabībī and Bābāyī 2013; Zipoli 1997, 2013.

[31] As far as the challenging issue of the cult of the images is concerned, it is worth noting here that the little explored textual world of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Persian writing *munshī* even includes a specific treatise on the subject, the *Ḥujjat al-Hind*, or the *Proof of India* (see Mujtabai 1978: 89).

Their mouths became sweet thanks to the ruby lips of the Beloved:
like a cup, they became empty of themselves….

They were all worshipers of the external form of down and mole,
like mirrors, they were all yearning for the simulacrum.

How could they see the beauty without signs?
How could they come to know that hidden secret?

Kṛṣṇa—Parīkṣit is suggesting in his (rhetorical) question—appears in the mirror of the *gopī*s, who are "empty of themselves" like the convex emptiness of the cup, whose paradoxical essence corresponds to the empty space ready to receive the wine, evoked as well by the *la'l* "ruby" of the Beloved's lips. Looking at the output of Amānat's master Bīdil (and to the works of several other *tāzagū* authorities), it is quite easy to link this reading of the *gopī*s like blanks to be filled (the cup as well as, again, the empty mirror "yearning for the simulacrum") to a complex series of other images used to meditate on the functions of *ṣūrat* / "form" as a precious index; from the *naqsh-i pā* "footprint" to the *ḥabāb* "bubble" to which, for instance, Bīdil devotes an entire twenty-two-distychs detailed description in his *maṡnawī*, *Ṭūr-i ma'rifat*. I quote here two lines as an example of Bīdil's poetic-philosophical argumentation, to which we can be reasonably sure Amānat is responding:

zahī waż'-i ḥabāb-i bī sar u pā
ki ḥayrānī zi naqsh-i ū-st paydā….
sabukrūḥī waqār-i imtiyāz-ash
tuhī az khwud shudan sāmān-i nāz-ash (Bīdil 1997, 3: 540)

Behold the state of the powerless bubble
from whose image bewilderment appears….
Having a light spirit is the honor of its distinction
becoming empty of itself is the equipment of its gracefulness

Just like the empty cup and the empty mirror of Amānat's line on the *gopī*s, Bīdil's bubble is instrumental in building a metaphorical play of paradoxes on the binary notion of emptiness and fullness, here allowing the logical-situational transformation (again, through the formal analogy of a round shape) of an essence-of-emptiness like the bubble into the *gawhar* / "pearl," the centuries-old Persian poetic image of essence *par excellence*. Śuka's reply (which in the Persian text covers no less than twenty-two *bayt*s) maintains the same tenor in terms of the imagery chosen to talk about the manifestation of Kṛṣṇa, who is read, to select just one example, through the image of the light of the sun being reflected by the endless multitude of mirrors represented by the particles of dust:

miṡl-i khwurshid harjā jilwagar shud
hujūm-i ẕarra har sū dar naẓar shud (Amānat manuscript, folio 101b)

Like the sun, he manifested himself in every place:
the assault of the particles of dust became visible in every direction.

As in the previous cases, the weight of the experimentations of Amānat's masters and predecessors is easily recognizable. In this respect, Amānat's "solar" introduction of Kṛṣṇa seems to be replying to the following line by Ṣā'ib-i Tabrīzī, built on the very image of the "assault of particles" (*hujūm-i ẕarra*):

az nūr-i waḥdat ānki dil-ash bahrawar shawad
kay az hujūm-i ẕarra parīshānnaẓar shawad (1985–95, 4: 2051).

The person whose heart has had its part of the light of oneness
how can he be disoriented by the assault of the particles of dust?

Notably enough, Amānat's figure of the Kṛṣṇa-sun multiplied in the atoms shimmering in the air responds to Ṣā'ib's observations on the illusory relationship between unity and multiplicity by building an intertextual triangle with another line by his master Bīdil, where the latter subtly claims a right to his bewilderment (*ḥayrat*), noting that the "assault of the manifestation" (*hujūm-i jilwa*) of the Beloved is the same in the particle of dust and in the sun (Bīdil 1997, 2: 502). It is in this context that Kṛṣṇa begins his discourse to the *gopī*s, asking, in the Persian rendering as well as in the Sanskrit original, if everything is well in Vraj (*dar shahr-i shumā khayr-ast imshab*) and trying to convince them to go back to their homes and their husbands (for example, "Everywhere a woman goes without the command of her husband (*bī ḥukm-i shawhar*) / she goes towards the hell (*dūzakh*) of pain and misfortune"). As in the above-mentioned passages, the Persian text takes up many more lines than the Sanskrit and the strategies of poetical expression do not change. Kṛṣṇa speaks of the love for himself along the same lines outlined above, saying for instance that the hearts of the *gopī*s "left themselves as waves" (*hamchu mawj az khwīshtan shud*), again recurring to the poetic tongue of his master to analyze the ontological paradoxes of erotic abandonment.[32] Such examples of interpretative poetics can easily be multiplied. Without adding much to what has already been observed, I will provide just one last example. In the reply of the *gopī*s to Kṛṣṇa, we may consider the use of the ubiquitous image of the *sarw-i āzād* ("the free-standing cypress") to textualize the devotional notion of Kṛṣṇa as the eternal beloved "who vanquishes distress" (*vṛjinārdana*):

tu khwud guftī ki har kas dil ba man dād
buwad az bār-i gham chūn sarw āzād (Amānat manuscript, folio 103b).

It was you who said that whoever gives his heart to me
will be free as a cypress from the burden of suffering.

Perhaps more peculiar, in terms of textual strategies, is the way in which the subjectivity of Amānat is infused into the text through his poetic persona. As a matter of fact, following Kṛṣṇa's discourse to the *gopī*s, the author inserts a seven-line-long *ghazal* addressed, in the *maṭla'*, or opening line, to Kṛṣṇa as the *shāh-i khūbān*, "the king of the beauties," and canonically bearing the *takhalluṣ* of the

[32] The synesthetic implications of the use of the metaphorical image of the *mawj*, "wave," to indicate both illusory self-identification and self-annihilation are richly explored by Bīdil, who studies extensively the image in at least four *ghazal*s where the term *mawj* is used as a *radīf* (Bīdil 1997, 1: 764, 766–67).

author in the *maqṭaʿ*, or closing line. The *ghazal*, which is introduced by the declaration "I have pronounced a *ghazal* regarding this situation" (*ghazal guftam dar ān ḥālat*), can be seen at the same time both as a lyrical commentary in the rarefied, decontextualized *langue* proper to the genre itself and as an attempt by the poet to intensify the voice of the *gopī*s by becoming one of them in dramatic terms. Amānat *is* here the *gopī*s and the *gopī*s *are* Amānat, asking the "king of the beauties," Kṛṣṇa, in a perfect *summa* of the *maʿshūq* and the *maʿbūd*, to "not leave me, by God, devoid of the ruby of your lips / because I am thirsty and have no other refuge but you" (Amānat manuscript: folio 103a). As in the above-mentioned passages from Bīdil's *Chahār ʿunṣur* and the *taẕkira*s, the textual *milieu* in which the lyrical verses are inserted reveals the possibility of actualizing them, by including Kṛṣṇa as an external referent (in this case, by far the dominant one), according to the same modalities I have described when speaking of the flute in the preceding paragraphs. More generally, this points to a possible, fascinating reception of the *ghazal* as a truly dramatic device both here and, for instance, in the rendering of the longing of the *gopī*s for Kṛṣṇa in 10.30 and 10.31, where they are made to sing *ghazals* for the absent beloved.[33]

Encoding and Decoding Kṛṣṇa: Multiple Referentialities

Amānat's treatment of several other iconic episodes of the tenth *skandha* could and should of course be questioned in our search for the "terms of inclusion" of Kṛṣṇa's figure in the eighteenth-century Indo-Persian *maṡnawī* dimension; from the *Shāhnāma*-like demon-killing hero of several *adhyāya*s to the iconic divine child eating the mud and showing the universe in his mouth of 10.8, where Yaśodā (*jasodhā*) observes "at once what has a place and what is beyond place" (*ba yak bār makān u lāmakān dīd*), asking herself if "this child of mine is that very God / of whose presence no place is empty" (*īn pisar-i mā bāshad khudāy-ī / ki khālī nīst az way hīch jā-ī*). It is perhaps more useful, however, to briefly focus on the long introductory section of the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt*, where some precious keys for the reading of the Persian Kṛṣṇa are provided and which will finally lead us—widening the perspective to the entire Persian Purāṇa by Amānat—to make some more general remarks on the reception and use of the text itself.[34]

The first twenty-one *bayt*s of Amānat's preface are devoted to a poetical description of the formless and omnipervasive "essence" (*ẕāt*) and its relationship with the material realm of immanence and experience. The weight of Bīdil's conceptual formulations can be felt, apart from the closely resembling style, especially if we consider the cosmogonic theories found in philosophical poems

[33] This seems to somehow retrace the generic modalities of the *dahnāma*, "ten letters," or *sīnāma*, "thirty letters," subgenre (Syed Hasan 1973), whose specific South Asian implications have been studied by Orsini (2006). Within the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt*, the lyrical form of the *ghazal* is often used to substitute direct speech while at the same time introducing the subjectivity of Amānat himself through the constant use of the *takhalluṣ*, "pen-name."

[34] An earlier, abridged version of the following paragraphs of this section has been published as a preview to this study (Pellò 2017a).

such as *'Irfān* and the *Muḥīṭ-i a'ẓam*. The latter, in particular, is sometimes quoted almost verbatim, as is the case when it deals with the process of manifestation of Pure Being.[35] However, from this point onwards, the poetical theology of Amānat Rāy acquires more definite and specific tones. After having introduced the sudden manifestation of the "absolute beauty of the Beloved" (*ḥusn-i muṭlaq-i yār*) (1.22) the poet explains the cosmic event as follows in line 23:

khwud-i ū āyīna shud khwud shakhṣ u timṣāl
hamān yakrangī-ash dar gardish-i ḥāl (Amānat manuscript: folio 2a)

He himself became the mirror, he became the person and the simulacrum,
such is his unity of color in the revolution of states

The manifestation of the "absolute beauty of the Beloved" in line 22 is undoubtedly reminiscent of a famous *ghazal* by Ḥāfiẓ of Shīrāz where the "beauty" (*ḥusn*) of the Beloved suddenly appears (*tajallī zad*) in the eternal (*azal*), creational event of love (Ḥāfiẓ 1983–84: 312). However, once again, Bīdil's experimentations are clearly observable even here, in the connection between "absolute beauty" (*ḥusn-i muṭlaq*) and its reflection in the "mirror" (*āyīna*), which leads to "self-identification" (*khwudbīnī*), explored in his *Dīwān* and his *maṣnawī*s (for example, Bīdil 1997, 1: 406). The identification of the surface instrument (*āyīna* "mirror"), the subject (*shakhṣ* "person"), and the object of vision (*timṣal* "simulacrum") of line 23 is an actualized declension of the traditional monistic identification of the triad of love (*'ishq*), lover (*'āshiq*), and beloved (*ma'shūq*). This kind of metaphorical identification had been repeatedly played upon by Bīdil himself, for instance with the auditive triad *nay-naghma-muṭrib* / "flute-melody-minstrel" in the *Muḥīṭ-i a'ẓam* (Bīdil 1997, 3: 583); another great master of late seventeenth-century Mughal poetry, Nāṣir 'Alī Sirhindī had even recast the triad in the field of paiting, with the identification of painting, painter, and painted image in a little studied *maṣnawī* (see Pellò 2017b). Looking at Amānat's contemporaries, it is worth noting, as well, how a closely comparable image of the mirror is being used in eighteenth-century Iran by Hātif-i Iṣfahānī (*died* 1783) to explore the Christian trinity in Persian poetical terms. In his well-known *tarjī'-band* he speaks in this regard of a "face reflected by three mirrors" (Hātif-i Iṣfahānī 1968: 18).[36] It is in this context of dense intertextual references, conceptual continuities, and aesthetic layerings of renovation that the specific notion of the *trimūrti* appears:

ba ḥasb-i khwāhish-i ān ẕāt-i yaktā
nukhustin shud si shikl-i khāṣ paydā

yakī barmahā ki dar gulzār-i dunyā
shud az nīlūfarī gul jilwafarmā

sabab-i ū shud pay-i ījād-i 'ālam
ki bāshad bāqī-yi bunyād 'ālam

[35] Consult, for instance, the use of the imagery revolving around the idea of *taqaddus* ("sanctity") of the *muḥīṭ* ("ocean") of Essence, and so on, in Amānat manuscript, folio 1b–2a and Bīdil 1997, 3: 583.

[36] A classical English translation of the entire poem appears in Browne (1959: 292–97).

digar ān jawhar-i i'rāż-i imkān
ba shikl-i bishn shud quwwat-i dah jān

siyum rudr ānki hamchūn turk-i bībāk
bisūzad kharman-i hastī chu khāshāk

'inān-i ikhtiyār-i būd u nābūd
ba dastishān buwad payvasta mawjūd

ba ẓāḥir garchi dar guftan judā-y-and
ba ẕāt-i khwīshtan īnhā khudāy-and (Amānat manuscript, folios 2a–2b).

According to the will of that unique essence
as was convenient, three specific shapes appeared.

The first is Brahmā who, in the rose garden of the world,
became manifest from a lotus flower.

His function was to bring the world into existence,
to make certain that the foundations of the world are stable.

Then, that pearl of the deployment of possibility
took the shape of Viṣṇu, with the power of ten lives.

Third came Rudra, who, just like a fearless Turk
burns the harvest of existence like straw.

The reins of the choice between being and nonbeing
are always held in their hands.

And although they are separated in speech,
in their own essence they are God.

The iconographical textualization from which Brahmā appears (*shud jilwafarmā*) in the "garden of the world" (*gulzār-i dunyā*) and the even more striking reading of Rudra through the metaphor of the "fearless Turk" (*turk-i bībāk*) burning "the harvest of existence" (*kharman-i hastī*) are compelling examples of how the wealth of material provided by the inventory of the Persian literary hypertext can be used in projecting "new" material onto the hypertext itself. But they are also interesting examples of what the eternal "garden," which had been the active background for most lyrical events in Persian from the Samanid times, or the beautiful "fearless Turk" that had been destroying hearts from the very prehistory of the Persianate cosmopolis in Central Asia,[37] can contain and evoke paradigmatically in an eighteenth-century Indo-Persian textual setting. In such a context, the unambiguous declaration of the fact that, for Amānat Rāy, Brahmā, Śiva, and Viṣṇu "in their own essence *are* God," having the "rein of choice between being and non being" (it is worth highlighting that they are not read here under the generic heading of *firishta* "angels" very often applied in Indo-Persian texts), appears to be perfectly

[37] On the metaphorical sociology of the Turk in Persian, see the introduction by Schimmel (1992: 137–43). Interesting historical perspectives on the formative period are contained in Tetley 2009: especially 17–20.

naturalized in the canonical environment recreated in the poem.[38] After having compared the function of the *avatāra* to that of a mirror which permits the observation of the absolute beauty (Amānat manuscript, folio 2b)[39] and after having enumerated and quickly described, in eleven *bayt*s, the first seven *avatāra*s (Matsya = *māhī* "fish"; Kūrma = *kashaf* "tortoise"; Varāha = *Barah*; Narasiṃha = *shīr* "lion"; Vāmana = *Bāvan*; Paraśurāma = *Parsūrām*; Rāma = *Rām*), Amānat at last comes to the object of his poem and, as we shall see, of his devotion. The relatively lengthy passage presenting the figure of Kṛṣṇa is worth translating in its entirety:

ba hashtum bār ān māh-i jahāngīr
ba shikl-i krishn ʻālam kard taskhīr

shud az ḥusn-i malīḥ-i khwud dar āfāq
namakfarsāy-i zakhm-i jān-i ʻushshāq

ʻadīm al-ma�san shud dar khūbī u nāz
ki mānd az dīdan-ash muzhgān ba khwud bāz

ba mushtāqān numūd ān ḥusn-i mastūr
ki khalq az jilwa-yi ū gasht maʻmūr

sar-i gīsūy-i mushkīn-ash tā bar u dūsh
pay-i mardum kamand-i gardan-i hūsh

kulāh-ash az parr-i ṭāwus bar sar
ba khūbī rashk-i gardūn-i purakhtar

ḥayā-rā hamzabānī bā nigāh-ash
ṣabā dilbasta-yi zulf-i siyāh-ash

bahā-yi jān du laʻl-i nūshkhand-ash
qiyāmat sāya-yi qadd-i buland-ash

ba tangī ghuncha mansūb-i dahān-ash
zi gham bārīk mū bahr-i miyān-ash

zi gawhar dar galū-yi ū ḥamāyil
hazārān dil ba yakjā karda manzil

numāyān gasht hangām-i naẓẓāra
ba jayb-i mihr-i tābān ṣad sitāra

guhar dar gūsh-i ān āyīnasīma
ba māh-ī kard kawkab dast bālā

kaf-i pā az ṣafā āyīna-yi gul
zi naqsh-i pā numāyān sāghar-i mul

[38] Interestingly enough, Amānat uses here the poetic argumentation of the "three names" and "one essence" as Hātif-i Iṣfahānī (1968: 18) does when speaking of the Christian trinity in his famous *tarjīʻband*.

[39] A translation of the passage can be found in Pellò (2014: 34).

shud az rang-i siyāh ān ḥusn mastūr
chu khāl-i mardumak sarmāya-yi nūr

ba īn ṭal'at shud ān māh-i dilārā
jahān-rā dilnishīntar az suwaydā (Amānat manuscript, folio 3a).

The eighth time that world-conquering moon
subjugated the world in the shape of Kṛṣṇa

That salty beauty reached the horizons
spreading salt on the wounds of the soul of the lovers

He became incomparable in beauty and coquetry
so that eyelashes, looking at him, remained spread wide.

He showed that hidden beauty to those who were anxious to see him,
so that creatures, through his epiphany, became prosperous.

His black curls, reaching his shoulders and his breast,
were a snare catching the neck of people's intellect.

His hat, with a peacock feather on top,
was the envy, for its beauty, of the sky full of stars.

Modesty spoke the same language of his gaze
breeze was an intimate lover of his black locks.

His two sugar-chewing rubies had the price of life
the Day of Resurrection is the shadow of his tall figure.

From his mouth descends every tiny blossom
and the hair derives its thinness from his waist.

Because of the pearl hanging on his throat
thousands of hearts have settled in one place.

At the moment of contemplation, there appeared
one hundred stars in the bosom of a gleaming sun.

The pearl in the ear of that mirrorlike figure
made a star to be imposed upon a moon.

The sole of his foot was pure as a mirror reflecting a rose
from his footstep appeared a cup of wine.

That beauty was hidden in its black color,
as the mole of the pupil of the eye is the capital of light.

With this aspect that world-embellishing moon
became more close to the heart than the black stain.

Kṛṣṇa is masterly described by recurring to the *sarāpā* (literally, "head to feet"), a little studied genre devoted to the detailed description of the beloved's physical beauty (Shafī'īyūn 2010) comparable to the Indic *sikh-nakh* (Busch 2011: 158) and

which enjoys a certain diffusion in the late Indo-Persian and Urdu contexts. Thus, Kṛṣṇa's beautiful figure is studied through a fashionable poetic lens, which serves well—via the multiple aesthetic citizenships of the *sarāpā-sikh-nakh*—in accommodating the traditional iconography of the *avatāra* within the textual environment of a Persian *maṣnawī*. Usually, the technique is that of selecting a series of deeply codified images that can, by close formal analogies or easy contrasts, be readily applied to the "new" referent. In other words, except for the explicit mentioning of Kṛṣṇa as the object of the description, no reader educated in Persian literary culture would find anything uncanny. On the other hand, the description is at the same time precise in its adherence to the prevalent iconographies of Kṛṣṇa and shows, once again, how an eighteenth-century Vaiṣṇava *munshī*—or for that matter any reader immersed in the multilingual and multiliterary milieu of late Mughal India—could recodify the centuries-old attributes, imagery, and metaphors employed here and how vast a world of referents (that is, Kṛṣṇa *multiplied* in the mirrors of the multitude of named and anonymous beloveds of the Persian tradition) he could see in them. A most immediate example is the treatment of the color black. If the "black curls" represent a perfect iconographic parallel, the dark color of Kṛṣṇa's skin (which, by the way, is not at all unprecedented in Persian poetry[40]) is celebrated by its paradoxical transformation into a more acceptable white "capital of light," through the similitude with "the pupil of the eye," which in turn becomes a "black mole"—the latter evoking the lingering image of the black *hindū* with which it is often in a relationship of syntagmatic cohesion.[41] In the line that follows, the "dark light" of Kṛṣṇa can be—thanks to the formal analogy provided by the round shape—at the same time a light full moon and the black stain (*suwaydā*) on the heart, which is a common figure of passionate love in Persian, deeply immersed in Ṣūfī culture (see for instance Sajjādī 1991: 111) and alluding to Muḥammad as well.[42] It would be fascinating, in this context, to explore the contextual *pendants* of the apparent contrast that is drawn by Amānat between a Turk (white) destroyer Rudra and a Hindu (black) sweet Kṛṣṇa (who is appropriately saucy like the dark gipsies / *lūliyān* of Hafez in a famous *chiaroscuro ghazal*).[43] Here, however, I will limit myself to underline that the oxymoronic (for the Persian aesthetic tradition) blackness of the beautiful "beloved" Kṛṣṇa will be discussed one generation later in Qatīl's *Haft tamāshā* (a more than plausible audience for Amānat's work), where the Khatrī convert explains to his Iranian audience that: "In the beginning, Kanhaiyā was extremely beautiful, harmonious, and fair-colored (*ṣabīḥalwān*). At a later stage, he was bitten by a snake and became black, but his blackness was so well blended that

[40] An example taken directly from the normative *Dīwān* of Ḥāfiẓ is where the beloved is described as having a wheat-colored cheek (*'āriż-i gandumgūn*); compare Ḥāfiẓ (1983–84: 134). Wheat-colored (that is, having the color of ripe wheat) is used in Persian as an image to convey the idea of a brownish color; a dark beauty in contrast with a white one.

[41] A critical review of this celebrated trope can be found in Meneghini (1990).

[42] The reference is to the well-known tradition based on the interpretation of *Qurān* 94: 1–3, the black stain (the symbolic mark of "darkness" on human hearts) on the heart of Muḥammad was cleansed by the angels with snow when he was still a boy.

[43] I am referring here to Ḥāfiẓ (1983–84: 22), sometimes read, in classical commentaries, as a reference to Tīmūr Lang.

it captured every heart" (Qatīl 1875: 15). Amānat's *sarāpā* of black Kṛṣṇa as the eternal Beloved leaves no space for technical observations in the doctrinal field. In particular, nothing is added as far as the special relationship between Kṛṣṇa and the "Essence" is concerned, especially if we consider the theological issues introduced by the interesting discussion on the *trimūrti* seen above. A quick look at the later translation of a pivotal passage of the first *skandha* (as previously mentioned, completed in 1751 with all the other *skandha*s up to the ninth) is useful in gaining a more precise idea of who Kṛṣṇa is for Amānat Rāy. The key *śloka* 1.3.28, containing the famous line *kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam* "but Kṛṣṇa is God in person" is translated as follows:

> *dah avatār andar īn bazm-i ṭilismāt*
> *numāyān gashta yakyak partaw-i ẕāt*
>
> *ẓuhūr-i kirishn ʻayn-i ẕāt-i yaktā-st*
> *ki khwud-i shamʻ-i shabistān-i tamannā-st* (Amānat Nd: 17).
>
> The ten *avatāra*s, in this symposium of magics,
> have shown, one by one, the beam of the Essence,
>
> [but] the manifestation of Kṛṣṇa is the unique Essence in itself:
> he is the very candle of the night-chamber of hope.

Amānat's translation is quite assertive in its identification of Kṛṣṇa with the very essence of God. Particularly if read in the light of the above-mentioned identification of the *trimūrti* with God (*ba ẕāt-i khwīshtan īnhā khudāy-and* "in their own essence they are God"), the passage is transparent in stating the theological preeminence of Kṛṣṇa (who subsumes, and thus precedes, the whole *trimūrti*) as the "unique Essence in itself." Especially noteworthy is the fact that the central Islamic notion of the unity/unicity of God (*tawḥīd*), rendered by the use of the attribute *yaktā* "unique," is expressly applied here to the "manifest" (*ẓuhūr*) figure of Kṛṣṇa. In Amānat's work, such doctrinal claims are flanked by devotional statements that are even more relevant if we consider the generic protocols of the Persian textual *milieu* in which they are inserted. This places the poetic figure of Amānat's Persian Kṛṣṇa at the center of a much wider sociotextual framework, where the layered personality of an eighteenth-century Hindu *munshī* acquires a new centrality. Following the autobiographical note, to which we shall return briefly, Amānat, as we have seen, inserts in the general description a note on the reasons and the occasion leading to the composition of the book (*sabab-i naẓm-i kitāb*) (Amānat manuscript, folios 15a–18a). He first describes an archetypical night dominated by "restlessness" (*bītābī*), "bewilderment" (*ḥayrat*), and the absence of real inspiration for both spiritual enlightenment and artistic creation (*shikār-i ṣad khayāl-i pūchmawhūm* "the hunter of a hundred imaginations, without a single inspiration") in which he was wandering with his heart in turmoil like "the wave of a vortex" (*mawj-i girdāb*). Then, he tells the reader, suddenly a "rising star of happiness" (*ṭāliʻ-i saʻd*) came to his aid in the person of an admonishing guide urging him to awake. The nocturnal event, which is strikingly resemblant of the encounter between Amānat and his master recounted in the *Taẕkira-yi Ḥusaynī* (see

above), draws on ultraclassical models in a recognizable Bidilian style of diction. Here, however, the key figure leading to the literary-spiritual transformation in Amānat's life has a proper name:

buwad nām-ash zi fayż-i ḥaqq dar āfāq
ba shuhrat bālakrishn-i kursmushtāq (Amānat manuscript, folio 16a)

His name is over the horizons for the grace of truth:
he is known as Bālakṛṣṇa the lover of soil

It is tempting to see an intertextual connection between this epiphany of Bālakṛṣṇa ("the infant Kṛṣṇa") in Amānat's narrative and the life-changing interventions of "*hindu* boys" (*hindūpisar*) in the literary biographies of other Hindu poets of Persian such as Bhūpat Rāy Bīgham Bayrāgī, whose life is transformed thanks to a beautiful boy named Nārāyaṇa (*Narāyan*).[44] Be that as it may (the model for all these *hindū* figures of beautiful youths are, it should be born in mind, the Christian or Zoroastrian boys of classical Persian works[45]), the words addressed to Amānat by this Persian speaking Bālakṛṣṇa are very clear in terms of the devotion required. After a reprimand concerning the opportunity of making something "through which your memory will survive" (*bikun kār-ī k-az ān mānad yādgār-ī*), the butter-stealing child from Vrindāban concludes his speech by telling Amānat:

ba nām-i khāṣṣ-i ū lab āshnā kun
ba nām u nang-i īn ʻālam duʻā kun

agar dārī zabān dar kām gūyā
kanhayā gū kanhayā gū kanhayā (Amānat manuscript, folio 17b).

Make your lips familiar with his proper name:
say a prayer for the honor of this world!

If you have, in your mouth, a tongue which is capable of speaking,
say Kanhaiyā, say Kanhaiyā, say Kanhaiyā!

Amānat's response to this request, which leaves little room for doubt about the devotional nature of this dedication, confirms the author's will to identify his spiritual path and provide his literary effort with a definite religious commitment:

chu īn nām az nishānī-yi ū shinīdam
ba maqṣūd ki mībāyad rasīdam

zadam būsa ba dast-i rahbar-i khwīsh
qadam dar rāh-i ū kardam sar-i khwīsh (Amānat manuscript, folio 17b).

When I heard this name from his image,
I reached the aim that was convenient

[44] Some considerations regarding the motif, with special reference to the transitional literary character of Bīgham Bayrāgī, can be found in Pellò (2015: 144–45), which includes additional bibliography.

[45] It would be fruitful to explore the apparent close connections of such tropes with the important subgenre known as *shahrāshūb*, where the "characters" of a textualized urban environment are described. On their South Asian counterparts, see Sharma 2004.

I kissed the hand of my guide
and directed my steps to his path.

As a matter of fact, Amānat openly declares his devotion here and there in the text, for instance in the *maqṭa'* (the closing *bayt*) of a *ghazal* inserted among the couplets of the translation of the very first *adhyāya* of *skandha* 1:

ba madḥ-i bādshahān kay buwad sar u kār-ash
ki guftugū-yi amānat ba 'ishq-i siyām buwad (Amānat Nd: 21)

He will never be occupied with the praise of the kings:
Amānat speaks only of the love for Śyāma.

As in the case of the self-identification with the *gopī*s seen above, the author's literary persona expressed by the *takhalluṣ* enters the text directly. In this *bayt*, Amānat sits together, so to say, with the object of his devotion, Kṛṣṇa, who in the best *'irfānī* tradition of the Persian lyrical genre, expressly subsumes the threefold function of the *mamdūḥ* (object of praise), *ma'shūq* (object of love), and *ma'būd* (object of devotion).

A Kṛṣṇaite Subjectivity in Persian

A final quotation from the opening of Amānat's rendering of the first *skandha* will serve as an ideal introduction to the concluding remarks of this paper. Here the semantic density of the figure of the "idol" (*but*)[46] reveals all its weight as a key both to the inclusive poetic strategies of Amānat and to his discourse on textual self-identification:

dar īn butkhāna-yi hind īn kitāb-ast
sawād-ash mashriq-i ṣad āftāb-ast

but-ī az har ṭaraf dar jilwa-yi nāz
barahmanpīsha u nāqūsdamsāz

tu-rā gar hast ẕawq-i butparastī
dar īn manzil dar āyī u na ham hastī

dam-ī binwāz nāqūs-i faghān-ī
zi 'ishq-i but bayān kun dāstān-ī

jabīn kun ṣandalālūd-i ghulāmī
sawār dar sarw-i āzād-i mudāmī

shawad āyina-at ṣāf az kudūrat
bibīnī jilwa-yi ma'nī zi ṣūrat

[46] The word *but*, originally meaning "Buddha" (consult Bailey 1931), has continuously been a pivotal one on the Persian poetical horizon since its very Central Asian beginnings, often connected with the image of the *shaman* < *śramaṇa*, originally representing the Buddhist monk (compare Melikian-Chirvani 1974).

chu ṣūratāfarīn bībīnī az dūr
sarāpāy-at shawad chūn mihr purnūr

shawī mamnūn-i but har jā ki bāshī
barāy-i khwīshtan ṣūrat tarāshī

agar ṣuratparast-ī yār-i man bāsh
ba ḥayrat āshnā dar anjuman bāsh

sujūd-i but tu-rā gar dilnishīn-ast
khudā dar i'tiqād-i man hamīn-ast (Amānat Nd: 2).

In this idol temple of India lies this book
whose black letters are the Orient of one hundred suns.

There is an idol that appears with its coquetry from every side,
who has the ways of a Brāhmaṇa, who is intimate with the bells.

Should you have a taste for idolatry
come into this house, unless you are already there!

Ring, for a while, the bells of a scream,
illustrate a story from the love for an idol!

Stain your front with the sandal of servitude,
on the free-standing cypress of eternity.

May your mirror be pure from every rust:
observe the epiphany of meaning in form!

When you see the creator of forms from faraway,
the whole of you becomes full of light like the sun.

You become grateful to the idol everywhere you go
and you carve an image for yourself.

If you are a worshiper of image, then be my companion:
come into the assembly, familiar with bewilderment.

If bowing down to the idol gladdens your heart,
well, in my belief God is precisely this!

The actualized values of the centuries-old image of the *but* and the antinomian fashioning of the literary self as a *butparast* "idolater," while calling on the most codified metaphorical language of Persian Ṣūfī poetry (where the search for the blame of the conformist is a stylistic feature at least from Sanā'ī of Ghazna, twelfth century), should be contextually read as an articulated series of poetical utterances of subjectivity.[47] As a matter of fact, this is no isolated example. An eloquent

[47] Deliberately echoing Michail Bachtin but leaning especially on Francois Rastier's discussions on textual semantics and Sheldon Pollock's stances on philology and history, by "subjectivity" I mean here (and elsewhere in this paper) the sociotextual dimension of what the French scholar calls the "enunciative nucleus" as it is represented in the text and/or situated in the generic protocols and rules (Rastier 2001: 14–18).

parallel comes from a slightly later original Persian hymn to Vārāṇāsī, the *Kāshī istūt* (the title is a Persian phonetic adaptation of the Sanskrit *Kāśī stuti*), written in 1778, by the Kāyastha from Allāhābād Matan Lāl Āfarīn, which opens with the following lines:

ḥamd-i but-i butkada-yi lāmakan
ānki numūd īnhama nām u nishān

bāng-i nukhust-i jaras-i ān maqām
kun fayakun-i pardakash-i khāṣṣ u ʻāmm

farsh-i zamīn ṭālib-i pābūsī-ash
ʻarsh-i barīn rāhib-i nāqūsī-ash

barahman-i ʻishq parastār-i ū
kawn u makān ḥalqa-yi zunnār-i ū (Āfarīn 1873: 2).

Praised be the Idol of the idol temple which has no place
the one who made manifest all these names and signs.

The very first ring of the bell of that high place
was the "Be!" which created every extant being.

The carpet of the Earth wishes to kiss his feet,
the supreme Throne is the monk who tolls his bell.

The Brahman of love is his caretaker
and the whole universe is the buckle of his belt.

The challenging overture where the "Praise to the Idol" (*ḥamd-i but*) evokes a canonical Arabic-Islamic *al-ḥamdu li-'llāh* (the praise belongs to God), while substituting it, overlays an accumulation of the usual images of idolatry (the idol, the idol temple, the bell, the monk, the kissing of the feet, the Brahman, the *zunnār*) interacting with core Islamic theological notions such as the creative "fiat" *kun fa-yakūn* and the exalted Throne (*ʻarsh-i barīn*). As in the case of Amānat's devotion for Kṛṣṇa, it is the intersection with the (pretextualized) context that provides these rhetorical utterances with new semantics. In its closing lines, the author actually dedicates the *Kāshī istūt* to the Brāhmaṇas. He deems himself a "Hindu secretary with obscure beliefs" (*hindūdabīr-i tīrarāy*). In those lines, the text is described as a guide (or even a substitute) for a pilgrimage to the sacred city of Vārāṇāsī (Āfarīn 1873: 43). In this context, the autobiographical information provided by Amānat both in the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* and in the *Rāmāyan* stands out for its self-promotional values, especially at the level of social and geographical appurtenance, in a productive play both with the literary persona of the author and with the multiple implied readers of the text. In the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt*, Amānat seems to be particularly interested in stressing that he was born in Lalpūr, which he was forced to leave due to a devastating flood and that he is a Khatrī belonging to the Seth subcaste (folios 14b–15a). More than twenty years later, in the introduction to his *Rāmāyan*, he would once again describe his native Lalpūr hyperbolically as the "envy of the eternal paradise" (*rashk-i khuld-i barīn*) or the "garden of Iram" (*bāgh-i iram*), and

he would also celebrate the history of his family (who had been there for one hundred and sixty years, beginning with his ancestor Gopāl), his own education there as a secretary and a poet of Persian, and the excellence of his fellow Khatrīs living there, described as "having the nature of Brāhmaṇas" (*barahmansirishtān*) and "reciters of the Veda" (*bedkhwān*) (Amānat 1872: 9–11).

In the same passage regarding the Smārtas mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Qatīl observes, after having mentioned the "various images" *(ṣūrathā-yi mukhtalif)* of Viṣṇu's manifestation, that the "Arabic translation of *avātar* is *maẓhar* (place of manifestation), and [the Smārtas] are so much in accordance with Ṣūfīsm (*taṣawwuf*) that they consider each image (*ṣūrat*) the *maẓhar* of God, and indeed God himself" (1875: 11). One is tempted to ask what was the actual circulation, reception, and use of works such as the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* and the *Srī Bhāgavat* within the multilayered and by no means neutral sociotextual backgrounds implied here as well as in Amānat's or Āfarīn's self-descriptions.[48] Or in both plainer and bolder terms: were Amānat's celebrated fellow Khatrīs and the other eighteenth-century North Indian secretaries writing in Persian who textualized themselves as *hinduwān* actually reading such texts, and how? Some precious preliminary indications come directly from the manuscript tradition. As the colophon informs us, the very manuscript on which the present paper is mainly based was copied in 1772[49] in the town of Farrukhābād (*balada-yi Farrukhābād*) by a certain Shīv Sahāe, who hastens to tell the reader that he resided in the *qasba* of Maham and describes himself as a *zunnārdār*, that is, a "bearer of the *zunnār*" (Amānat manuscript, folio 499b). Moreover, the same Shīv Sahāe specifies that the book—which contains, it may be useful to remember here, more than eighteen thousand *maṡnawī* lines—was copied in just a few days from another copy, owned by a certain Lāla Jagannāth, the son of Sadānand, a Khatrī living in Shāhjahānpūr. Thus, the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt*, written in Delhi by a Khatrī *bhakta* from Lalpūr, circulated among eighteenth-century *munshī*s from Uttar Pradesh in a non-courtly geography. Shīv Sahāe would have taken to the *qaṣba* of Maham the book he had copied in Farrukhābād from the copy belonging to Lāla Jagannāth, who was in turn based in Shāhjahānpūr. The very size of the manuscript, a small portable book (16 x 8 cm) particularly if compared to the enormous number of lines it contained, is also an explicit indication of its private use. Among the most notable features of the manuscript is the fact that the first page bears as a dedicatory heading the unmistakable invocation *Srīkrishnāyanamah*, in place of the customary Islamic *basmala* (Amānat manuscript, folio 1b). Again, this is not at all an isolated case; if we look beyond the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt*, similar invocations

[48] In the absence of extensive philological explorations and careful textual analyses, an articulated discussion on the reception of these texts is still beyond our reach. However, considering their poetic refinedness, the fact that they were among the first books to be printed in North India and some external evidence—such as the stamp from the North-West Frontier Province on the *Srī Bhāgavat* copy in the British Library or Qatīl's observations from Nawābī Lucknow—one can tentatively suppose that they were read well beyond the immediate circle of the disciples of Bīdil and the world of the Hindu *munshī*. It might not be too fanciful then to imagine a truly transregional readership, including West Asian travelers as well as Rāj officials (consult also Pellò 2014: 41). To avoid any premature enthusiasm, however, it is worth highlighting that, until the present, I have not been able to locate any copy of Amānat's work (neither manuscript nor printed) in Iranian collections.

[49] Precisely during the beginning of the month of Ramaḍān 1186, corresponding to late November 1772.

to Kṛṣṇa (but also Gaṇeśa and other deities) take the place of the traditional *basmala*. These can be found in several manuscripts authored and/or copied by Persian-writing Hindu intellectuals, beginning at least in the 1670s. Just to name a few scattered examples, in reverse chronological order: the abridged Persian version entitled *Sirāj al-ṭarīq* of the *Nasiketopakhyāna* by the Khatrī from Sialkot Rūp Narāyan (a Gopāl devotee flourishing at the beginning of the eighteenth century), copied in 1767, bearing the invocation *srī gopāl u srī kirishn sahāe* (Rūp Narāyan manuscript, folio 1a); the Mughal *Srī Bhāgavat Mahāpūrān*, copied in 1759 in Shāhābād by a scribe named Rajkaran, bearing *Srī Ganeshāyanamah*, just like the *Purān Srī Bhāgavat*, copied in 1726 and held as well in the Aligarh collection (see Zaidi 1994: 60–61, 69); and, most notably, the volume containing the Persian *Bhagavad Gītā*, *Gītāsārā*, and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, copied in 1080/1670 in a compact format (21.5 x 14.5 cm), where each of the three texts is introduced with the dedication *Srī krishna jayo* (Subhā Chand manuscript, folios 44b, 88a, 92b) and where the name of scribe Subhā Chand is recognizable, for instance at folio 91b, where he defines himself as a Kāyastha Srīvastava from Gwālior. In this latter manuscript, the invocation *Srī krishna jayo* is scattered throughout the text itself (especially in the *Gītāsārā*, where it appears frequently in red ink) and the invocation *Hanuman jayo sahāe* is also present (folio 319a); notably enough, on the first page of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* the eulogy *Srī krishna jayo* is quite eloquently placed *above* the *basmala*.[50]

In the subtitle of his brilliant pamphlet *Filologia e libertà*, the Italian classicist and historian Luciano Canfora calls philology “the most subversive of disciplines.”[51] Unequivocally endorsing such a statement, I suggest that a philological study of Persian works such as the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt* and several others of its kind, as well as their transmission and reception, would assist us in decisively subverting many die-hard essentializations—first of all, in terms of linguistic boundaries and walls—and presentist views regarding premodern and early modern Islamicate South Asian cultures. While showing that it might be useful to begin talking of a largely unexplored Vaiṣṇava-Kṛṣṇaite current *within* Indo-Persian literature, whose main producers, broadcasters, and consumers were apparently the Persian-educated members of Hindu scribal groups, such profound excavations challenge as well many preconceived views regarding the use of the texts, projecting these works onto a noncourtly provincial background of capillary circulation. Persian, once more proving its plasticity as an inclusive platform, should thus be numbered among the other “languages” of Kṛṣṇaite textuality, in a nonpurist, mutual perspective. In other words, if Amānat Rāy’s as well as other comparable Persian remakes of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* might be even too easily (and predictably) categorized, in Lawrence Venuti’s fashionable terms, as “domesticating” translations (for instance, Venuti 1995: *passim*), one would question to which domesticity the domestication is supposed to lead. As a matter of fact, texts such as the *Jilwa-yi ẕāt*—

[50] Such interesting data throw new light on polemic declarations such as those by the eighteenth-century *taẕkira* writer ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb Iftikhār on Hindus writing in Persian, who criticizes their work precisely because they are “devoid of the brilliant glare emanating from the eulogies of the Lord of the Prophets” (cited in Pellò 2014: 22).

[51] “La più eversiva delle discipline” (consult Canfora 2008).

programmatically endowed with a rich semantic plasticity—seem to domesticate Kṛṣṇa in the ambit of Persian literary culture while at the very same time pointing to the existence of parallel, enlarged conceptual/performative grammars through which they could be read, thus providing the tools for a noncontrastive domestication of Persian to certain aspects of Kṛṣṇaite *bhakti*. From the point of view of the Persianate Hindu *munshī*, Kṛṣṇa is comfortably at home in Shīrāz as much as in Mathurā, and there is no need to "take him back" anywhere, since both places truly belong to the realm of the Indo-Persian writer. A properly philological exploration of the interstices of such a text-world will certainly serve as a fine tool for integrating and rethinking a number of narratives regarding the sociosemiotic articulation of modern South Asian religious "identities."

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